Universidade de Aveiro Departamento de Línguas e Culturas
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Ana Luísa de Oliveira Gonçalves Pires

Presente, imaginação e memória em Zakes Mda e Mia Couto

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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Doutor em Literatura, realizada sob a orientação científica do Doutor Kenneth David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro

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Palavras-chave

Zakes Mda, Mia Couto, literatura Africana pós-colonial contemporânea, história, memória, cultura, identidade.

Resumo

Apesar de marcadas por contextos históricos e culturais distintos, é possível observar nas obras de dois dos autores mais significativos da África do Sul e de Moçambique, Zakes Mda e Mia Couto respectivamente, perspectivas semelhantes no que diz respeito à recuperação das memórias histórico-culturais e à sua contribuição para a construção e compreensão das identidades pós-coloniais. Através da ficção, Zakes Mda e Mia Couto combinam a ligação da História a factos concretos com a necessidade de revelação associada à memória, criando assim espaços importantes para a discussão de algumas das mais complexas questões colocadas às identidades pós-coloniais. Para além dos contextos políticos, culturais e históricos que caracterizam e distinguem as literaturas sul-africana e moçambicana, tanto Zakes Mda como Mia Couto assumem nas suas obras a necessidade de analisar as identidades pós-coloniais contemporâneas dos dois países através da recuperação das suas memórias históricas.

Keywords

Zakes Mda, Mia Couto, contemporary African postcolonial literature, history, memory, culture, identity.

Abstract

In spite of the specificities pertaining to South African and Mozambican history and culture, in the novels of two of the most significant literary representatives of those Southern African nations, Zakes Mda and Mia Couto respectively, it is possible to observe similar perspectives regarding the recovery of cultural memories and histories and their contribution toward the construction, development and understanding of postcolonial identities. Through fiction, Zakes Mda and Mia Couto combine history's concern with concrete facts and memory's attachment to disclosure, opening important spaces to debate some of the most complex questions posed to African postcolonial identities. Beyond the distinctive political, cultural and historical contexts that have shaped South African and Mozambican literatures, both Zakes Mda and Mia Couto assume in their novels the need to examine contemporary South African and Mozambican postcolonial identities by resorting to the reclamation of their historical memories.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> Presente e memória, esse lugar onde também a história se inscreve e permanentemente se (re)faz (…), a condição pós-colonial vive exactamente de um novo modo de se entender o passado e o presente, olhando-os de um modo alternativo, numa revisitação, porventura, incómoda – e, por isso mesmo, tanto mais necessária – de um imaginário assente em circunstâncias materiais concretas, mas que os regimes discursivos também ajudaram a construir.
>
> Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, *Portugal não é um país pequeno*, 2006

The conquest and subjugation of African regions and peoples occurred through military action, supported and justified by the circulation of varying types of texts. Penetrating into spaces previously unknown to the Western world, Europeans travelling and exploring the African continent from the fifteenth century recorded through writing the strangeness occasioned by the uncharted territories they came across.[1] Manifest in these early writings on

[1] This feeling of strangeness ascribed to the African continent persists in contemporary times, even though it may be revealed under completely different guises. In "A 'Real' Sci-Fi Flick in Africa?" Oghenetoja Okoh argues that the manner in which Africa and Africans alike are portrayed in Neill Blomkamp's 2009 hit film *District 9*, whose science-fiction action takes place in Johannesburg in the year 2010, continues to betray a colonialist type of perspective: "The parallels between the Western sci-fi imagination and colonialism are noticeable. Much like astronauts are often portrayed as brave soldiers who leave their home for the deep unknown, Africa has been the darkness into which many intrepid colonial sailors have leapt. The aliens are usually gruesome (*Aliens*), war-like (*Predator*), and individuality is presented as a sacrifice for conformity (the Borg in the *Star Trek* series)". Even though Blomkamp's film has been praised for inserting Africa into mainstream sci-fi discourse, allowing a wider discussion of meaningful sociological issues pertaining to the African continent, its negative and uniform depiction of the Nigerians as engaged in ritual cannibalism, prostitution, crime and traffic has caused a great sense of unease, as it seems to perpetuate colonial ideas about Africa and

Africa is a compulsive effort to catalogue the unfamiliar natural and human features encountered, in what is an attempt to interpret those features according to Western conventions, thereby producing a sense of control over them. Examining the connections between early Portuguese writings on Africa and the Portuguese expansionist project in *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa*, Josiah Blackmore discerns this kind of interpretative, yet controlling potential as extremely common in early texts:

> writers on Africa make observations on geography, the customs and skin color of natives, and the new natural and human worlds that nautical travel reveals. These observations seek to taxonomize – and therefore contain and control – the spaces and peoples of Africa. The Western observer shapes the world and its inhabitants and infixes them into a schema of observation and knowledge (…) (73).

Presumptuously assuming the new African lands as "*terra incognita*, as worlds without names, waiting like Eden for words and history to envelop them" (243), as Andrew Smith indicates in "Migrancy, hybridity, and postcolonial literary studies", this obsession with the description, classification and naming of unfamiliar features so common in official European records limits the recognition of any existent historical, social, and/or cultural contexts in those foreign territories.[2] This European enterprise of mapping and naming foreign

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Africans: "Unfortunately, this sci-fi flick carried with it the same unimaginative, othering gaze Western media production reserves for primitive, carnal Africa".

[2] This arrogant attitude is perceived by Padre Manuel Antunes in the historical narrative of Mia Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia* when he reads the official documents describing the journeys, territories and inhabitants across the Eastern coast of Africa:

> Foi lendo as oficiais escrituras e dando conta dos nomes da viagem e do seu destino. Chamavam de Torna-Viagem a este percurso da Índia para Portugal. E chamavam de Contra-Costa ao Oriente de África. Tudo fora nomeado como se o mundo fosse uma lua: de um só lado visível, de uma só face reconhecível. E os habitantes do mundo oculto nem o original nome de "gentios" mantinham. Designavam-se agora de "cafres". A palavra fora

territories was not restricted to geographic contexts, but encompassed already central political and cultural aspects of the colonialist project as well. A powerful means of asserting European superiority, these written records constitute for many critics one of the earliest exercises of colonial power. European (textual) authority over African territories evidenced by these accounts opened the way and was used as justification for the ensuing physical conquest of those territories, as Smith outlines:

> it was *in and through* travel writings and other forms of literature that Europeans learned to think of themselves as fundamentally different from the rest of the world. Of course, many of the accounts that Europeans gave of Africa, Asia, and the Americas were made in the prelude to or in the context of colonial rule. Descriptions of local practices and beliefs often sanctioned European governance as a moral force, or what is now called a "humanitarian intervention" (243).

In the historical narrative of *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, Mia Couto raises important questions related to these European accounts and their role in the colonizing process. To a certain degree, the exaggerated accounts of non-European spaces and peoples might have resulted from ignorance and fear of the unknown, common even among different African peoples (as can be seen in the terrible accounts the inhabitants of the Ilha de Moçambique give of the inland peoples of the Monomotapa, see 295). Nonetheless, and regardless of their underlying intents, it was common for those accounts to be manipulated in order to validate the undertakings of conquering and exploiting African lands and peoples, and the resort to violence that accompanied it. As Mawuena Logan argues in "The Image of Africa in

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roubada aos árabes. Era assim que estes chamavam aos africanos. Os cafres eram os infiéis. Não porque tivessem outra fé. Mas porque se acreditava não terem nenhuma (72).

the Age of Imperialism and Beyond: The Myth of Postcolonial Africa", "the subjugation of Africa could not have been effectively articulated without the systematic construction, maintenance and perpetuation of stereotypes" (42). It is this impulse that is denounced by the Goan physician who also travels aboard the ship from Goa to Mozambique when he refuses to help the Jesuit missionary D. Gonçalo da Silveira with his enquiries about the inhabitants of the little known territory of the Monomotapa, claiming that the Portuguese Jesuit was not merely looking for information about the territory and its inhabitants, but for an excuse for the subsequent moral and material exploitation of that population: "Quando se inventam assim maldades sobre um povo, é para abençoar as maldades que vão praticar sobre ele" (294).

Related to the obsession with naming and classifying so evident in those early colonial texts is a constant preoccupation with the establishment and delimitation of borders, not only physical, but also psychological, in the new territories. Questioning the critical validity of the concept of the border for the understanding of postcolonial realities in "Between Centers and Margins – Writing the Border in the Literary Space of the Portuguese Language", Ana Margarida Fonseca argues that the obsession with the delimitation of geographical spaces among the colonizers also encompassed the cultural and historical spaces of the colonized peoples, affecting the development of their identities:

> Legitimizing the conquests of the African and American continents demanded, on the part of the colonists, a definition of dividing lines which would demark a physical entity recognizable to all. In addition to this, the existence of formal limits affirmed absolute authority over subjugated peoples, impeding the same affirmation of other sovereignties, whether local or European. These borders, dependant on the contingencies of the processes of colonization, ignored previous ethnic, geographic and cultural distinctions, and imposed new forms for the regrouping of peoples, cultures and territories in a process which had eventual

> implications for the identifying definition of the communities involved (43-44).

The establishment of such physical and mental separation between colonizer and colonized aided in the validation of further binary oppositions such as civilized/savage and white/black. Those pairs of opposites were not only based upon but also meant to validate the delimitation of spaces between colonizer and colonized, asserting that there was no space for ambiguity or trespassing, and were therefore also used as a justification for the colonizing process.

In response to centuries of varied modes of European colonial dominance throughout the African continent, much of which was consolidated via written texts that confirmed the hierarchic ideals of colonization, the rewriting of past colonial narratives has unsurprisingly assumed one of the most important functions in postcolonial African literature. Discussing the various layers of significance associated with the concept "postcolonial", Miguel Vale de Almeida highlights in *Um Mar da Cor da Terra: Raça, Cultura e Política da Identidade* some of the most relevant implications of the concept for contemporary postcolonial writers:

> O conceito será útil na medida em que possa ajudar a descrever ou caracterizar a mudança nas relações globais que marca a transição desigual da era dos impérios para a era pós-independências. Por um lado, ele é universal, na medida em que sociedades colonizadas e colonizadoras foram ambas afectadas pelo processo. Por outro, o termo pós-colonial não pode ser meramente descritivo disto ou aquilo, do antes ou do agora. Ele deverá reler a colonização como parte de um processo essencialmente transnacional e transcultural global, produzindo uma reescrita descentrada, diaspórica ou global de anteriores grandes narrativas imperiais centradas em nações (232).

In a post-independence stage marked by global movement (which includes not only the circulation of capital, but of people and

information as well), rewriting colonial narratives and histories will necessarily entail a transcultural discussion of this phenomenon as well as an increasingly inclusive analysis of the effects of the colonizing and decolonizing processes on both former colonized and colonizing societies. In "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?", philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah clearly indicates that one of the effects of global movement is the rejection of the notion of authenticity regarding cultural identities:

> If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). And there is a clear sense in some postcolonial writing that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West – the binarism of Self and Other – is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn to live without (663, italics in the original).

If during the early stage of postcolonial literature, which coincided with the historical period of anti-colonial struggle and nationalist movements, literary and theoretical works tended to focus almost exclusively on the pernicious effects of colonization on the colonized subjects,[3] four decades after the demise of most European colonialism postcolonial critics are calling for a change of perspective, one that allows space in contemporary postcolonial literature for an

[3] As Wole Ogundele claims in "Devices of Evasion: The Mythic versus the Historical Imagination in the Postcolonial African Novel", the initial stage of African postcolonial literature was marked by a strong political appeal: "To the extent that culture can be distinguished from history, Europhone African literature started, initially at least, more as a reaction to a specific historical moment than as an expression of culture. That history is of course colonialism, which it responded to in subject as well as in pedagogic aims" (Ogundele, 125). Indeed, some of the most important African or diasporic African nationalist movements of the twentieth century were marked by a strong connection between politics and literature. African cultural theorists Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) and Aimé Césaire (Martinique) were all involved in anti-colonialist struggle as poets and politicians.

examination of the multilateral repercussions that have stemmed from the complex cultural relations established since the early stages of colonization. As Monica Bungaro explains in "Negotiating the Local and the Global: Some Uneasy Conjectures on Postcolonial Studies and Pedagogy", contemporary postcolonial theory is expected to focus on local issues (including not only subjects and concerns that might have been repressed by colonial discourses, but very importantly, controversial topics pertaining to postcolonial contexts), always bearing in mind their interconnection to the inexorable global movement of contemporary times:

> Postcolonial theory and consequently, courses based on that theory, need to engage more deeply with internal hierarchies and divisions in postcolonial societies. They need to focus on the texts' engagements with the material conditions and cultural ideologies prevailing in the social formations these texts belong to while simultaneously paying attention to global issues and concerns. Historically specific struggles with their own infinitely variegated strands of residual, dominant and emergent formations need to be configured within the world-system of "actually existing capitalism" (San Juan 22). The very operation of capital has created new opportunities but also new dilemmas and contradictions that have brought about the local and the global to the forefront of political consciousness. In this sense, then, under the circumstances of global capitalism the local cannot be conceived without reference to the global (101).

Like most African literatures, black South African literature has been influenced by exogenous sources and has had to go through varying processes of adaptation. For that reason, David Atwell argues in the Introduction to *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* that the term transculturation aptly describes the conditions within which black writing culture was established in

South Africa.[4] Contrasting with the notion of acculturation, which implies a sense of uncritical passivity among the "recipient" cultures, and going beyond the concept of cultural translation, which refers to the translation of material from one culture by another culture, according to the specific circumstances of the latter, transculturation suggests "multiple processes, a dialogue in both directions and, most importantly, processes of cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms" (18). Among other influences, transculturation recognizes the centrality of colonization, for it "has had the effect of disallowing everyone from remaining unchanged, and therefore has kept histories, traditions and identities radically in flux (17). In the specific context of black South African literature, acknowledging the reciprocity resulting from the contacts established between dominant and dominated cultures transforms transculturation into a critical point of connection between international postcolonial studies and local black writing.

Contemporary postcolonial Mozambican society, which has been shaped by a multiplicity of cultures, also requires examination from a broad perspective that can embrace its complex cultural and historical contexts. Even though not overtly mentioning the notion of transculturation, Mia Couto's emphasis on the notion of "mestiçagem" when questioned about the usefulness of the concept of multiculturalism seems to indicate the need to find a more adequate cultural perspective for contemporary globalized societies (which includes former colonized nations), one that does not serve to deepen age-old constructed differences between "us" and "them", but that can acknowledge the prevailing cultural diversity to be found in each individual:

[4] Atwell adapts the term transculturation from the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who used the term for the first time to describe the cultural and historical condition of Cuba in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947).

> Agrada-me se a minha cultura não for vista como a cultura do outro. E se se entender que dentro de cada um de nós existem culturas diversas. Não há culturas puras. A ideia de mestiçagem também me agrada, mas há sempre o perigo de se pensar que ela surge porque há duas linhas puras que depois se misturam. Mas essas linhas puras já são misturadas. A mestiçagem é a nossa própria condição. O multiculturalismo é muito mais antigo do que pensamos (Duarte, 23).

Like other postcolonial writers and theorists, Couto is suspicious of essentialist multiculturalist conceptions that "rely on the assumption that there were primeval, separate, and distinct cultural orders" (Smith, 251).[5] In "Africans' Memories and Contemporary History of Africa", Bogumil Jewsiewicki and V. Y. Mudimbe reason that one of the myths surrounding African history that needs to be countered consists in the complete separation between pre-colonial and colonial time periods:

> we have seen the creation of an artificial division of the African past into two periods, the colonization period constituting a major border. Precolonial history was then presented as the melting-pot of truly African experiences; colonial history was neglected because it was perceived as a parenthesis, a time of acculturation and of domination (3).

The major problem stemming from this artificial separation is that it is commonly accompanied by the establishment of utopian perspectives regarding the pre-colonial period on the one hand, and disabling conceptions of the colonial period on the other. Those essentialist perspectives result, among other things, in the rejection of internal conflicts during the pre-colonial times, in the association of African tradition with the rural (refusing the coexistence of the urban

[5] For a fierce criticism of multiculturalism as an inverted form of discrimination that maintains a distance towards "the Other's" identity, see Slavoj Zizek's "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" (1997).

and tradition), or in the conception of African societies as unable to exert any kind of control over their future as the result of colonization alone. These myths contested by Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe relate in some way to complex and much-debated questions dealing with African identities and African traditions. By rejecting the creation of artificial boundaries established by colonialism (though acknowledging its negative effects in former colonized societies), Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe's position seems to contrast with that assumed by many Africanists, who regard traditional African culture as immune and opposed to Western influences:

> It is striking to note that prominent Africanist writers, community activists, and political officials (including Thabo Mbeki, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and Mongane Wally Serote) rarely see the need for definition and distinction when referring to 'traditional African culture', but rather assume this to be a known and fixed entity – generally understood in opposition to Western culture and usually presented as morally superior. To them, the term 'Afrocentric' appears to imply a better order, a more appropriate solution, one that is more 'natural' or in tune with the cultural values of the African majority, a positive way of redressing the past imprint of Eurocentric thought and practice (Marschall, 246)

Assuming the need to counter these disabling myths, most postcolonial theorists advocate that the current postcolonial context requires a conception which might be consistent with transculturation,

> *not* for the mixing of once separate and self-contained cultural traditions, but rather for the recognition of the fact that all culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the purportedly "other", and in which the attempts of the dominant culture to close and patrol its hegemonic account are threatened by the return of minority stories and histories, and by strategies of appropriation and revaluation (Smith, 252, italics in the original).

It thus seems to follow that transculturation could become a useful notion for contemporary Mozambican literature as well, seeing that it has certainly been influenced by exogenous sources, originating mainly, though not exclusively, from Portuguese and Brazilian literatures. In "A Questão da Diferença na Literatura Moçambicana", José Luís Cabaço acknowledges those Western influences and the important contribution they have made to Mozambican literature:

> A questão fundamental da diferença na literatura de Moçambique situa-se no binómio influência ocidental- tradição oral. Os africanos, pela herança colonial e pelo poder hegemónico euro-americano, não poderíamos permanecer alheios às ressonâncias dessas propostas culturais que nos chegam do norte (66).

Cabaço laments that African cultures and identities are so often misunderstood and misrepresented by the Western public, who insist on perpetuating an image of authenticity and/or exoticism:

> Contudo, o Ocidente continua a não querer entender a África. (…) A tendência é celebrar [a] diferença, petrificando a cultura africana nos elementos que a distinguem.
> Exatamente por isso, simplifica-se a atitude: e o mesmo ocidente que invadiu o continente, explorou os africanos, violentou a sua cultura e alienou as suas elites, reclama a todo o momento, em plena era da globalização, uma cultura africana imaculada, uma imagem virtual a que o continente não pode corresponder (66-67).

The biggest concern surrounding this conception of African cultures and identities is, for Mia Couto, the manner in which this desire among the Western audience for an African authenticity is matched by a related desire among Africans themselves:

> África não é uma coisa assim tão estranha, mas tem de ser percebida. Não basta pedir aos europeus que a entendam. Também os africanos têm de se revelar para além das ideias feitas que importaram sobre si próprios. O drama é mais profundo porque os africanos se revêem numa identidade que foi

> avançada, como uma essência, para responder à tese segundo a qual não temos história ou cultura. Mas uma nova geração está a nascer e a trabalhar de uma outra maneira, afirmando-se sem bandeiras, nem pressas (Duarte, 23).

This new generation of Africans Couto refers to, free from the political restraints of nationalist movements and caught in a process of globalization already underway, is likely to develop a distinct understanding of the challenges posed and opportunities presented to Africa and Africans today. According to Appiah, the social, political and economic contexts of globalized postcolonial societies have become determinant for contemporary postcolonial identities:

> If an African identity is to empower us, so it seems to me, what is required is not so much that we throw out falsehood but that we acknowledge first of all that race and history and metaphysics do not enforce an identity: that we can choose, within broad limits set by ecological, political and economic realities, what it will mean to be African in the coming years ("African Identities", 89).

In the essay "Apontamentos para conceptualizar uma Europa pós-colonial", Paulo Medeiros exposes another question deserving attention from postcolonial theorists, which is the relative lack of attention historical and cultural perspectives focusing on previous colonizer societies have received from postcolonial theory, when compared to the emphasis given to those dealing with former colonized societies. Medeiros suggests that given the degree to which cultural exchange has marked many colonial ventures the concept "postcolonial" should be extended to include the former metropolises:

> Um dos problemas mais flagrantes dos estudos pós-coloniais (…) pouca ou nenhuma atenção tem recebido: embora um dos pressupostos da teoria pós-colonial seja o desmantelamento de falsas dicotomias entre metrópole e colónia, com o intuito de (re)valorizar a produção cultural dos territórios colonizados, na

> realidade essas dicotomias acabaram por ser reificadas através de um processo de culpabilização excessiva por tudo o que parece opor-se-lhe. Um dos alvos mais visados em grande parte dos estudos pós-coloniais tem sido a Europa, ou os vários países europeus com um passado imperial mais marcado. Quer através da demonização desse passado imperialista (…), quer através das tentativas de relativizar a importância da Europa na construção do mundo moderno, grande parte da teoria pós-colonial ignora a complexidade das relações coloniais, a multiplicidade de experiências coloniais e a sua diversidade temporal e geográfica. E ao mesmo tempo impede a possibilidade de conceber a aplicação de uma perspectiva pós-colonial para além dos territórios colonizados (340).

This suggestion that the concept "postcolonial" should extend beyond the geographical and mental boundaries of former colonies, so as to encompass all the societies that have been connected to colonialism and its aftermath, entails a more flexible and inclusive application of the concept. This is of extreme importance, given that the assumption that the "postcolonial" refers exclusively to the former colonies, and the neglect of the complex array of questions colonization and decolonization have posed for former colonizing powers contradicts one of the most important facets of postcolonial studies, that of challenging constructed dichotomies, and can result in limited and limiting perspectives to say the least.[6] Among the most

[6] The recent episode (the events took place in 2006, but the case only became publicly noticed in 2009, after a lawsuit was officially filed; see Netter) of a white student born in Mozambique and later naturalized as a United States citizen who claims to have been discriminated against by colleagues and university staff (he was ultimately suspended from university) for describing himself as a "white African-American" during a class cultural exercise, has raised a series of questions related to erroneous conceptions of (racial) identities that mirror (although in a somehow inverted form) former essentialist dualisms in the present. As Violet B. Lunga concludes in "Of Hair Identities: Stretching Postcolonial Cultural Identities", there are some limits to the ways in which identity politics are used, because it can easily "obscure differences within groups and further, it tends to reduce cultural practices to biology" (107). She goes on to argue that this kind of reductionist thinking applied to identity politics "re-inscribes 'scientific' racism with its classification of human beings according to biology" (107). Even though the designation "African-American" evidently carries strong historical, social and

pressing challenges posed to contemporary postcolonial theorists, Atwell stresses the need to escape the maintenance of those mutually exclusive dichotomies, as they manifest

> the inadequacy of centre-periphery binarism, and the related, demeaning notion of authority being disposed exclusively from the metropolis in a linear vector, which carries with it the corollary that "writing back" is the only kind of response – a kind of reversed linearity (22).

Bungaro similarly discloses some of the dangers behind a reductive and antagonistic line of study, and calls for a broader range of perspectives to be included in contemporary postcolonial studies:

> Postcolonial theory (…) closes off several lines of inquiry that may be addressed to this literature in favour of the one that reads it as "resisting" or "subverting" the centre, the coloniser, the West, thus offering metropolitan powers a mirror in which their own reflection might be included. Starting from these premises, the imperative is to discuss and explore how the empire writes back not whether it writes back (98).

In his analysis of post-apartheid literature in *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*, Dennis Walder concludes that, as in other postcolonial locations, the complex historical, socio-political and cultural contexts of contemporary South Africa highlight well some of the principal questions of the post-colonial debate, such as the great permeability that characterizes both the "post-colonial" and the "colonial" conditions:

> Contemplating the South African situation and its history helps us realize the limitations of thinking of "colonial" and "post-

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cultural connotations, like any other identity category it may give rise to ambiguity, and carries with it the risk of essentializing. Besides a discussion on the usefulness of categorizing identities, the episode also seems to reveal the need for "post-colonial" or other perspectives and discussions to reach beyond the former colonies, so that they may include all the subjects affected by the colonizing and decolonizing processes, regardless of their ethnic origins or political positions, and recognizing their historical and cultural roles in those processes.

> colonial" as distinct, rather than intermingled conditions which vary according to the historical and cultural specifics of the place. Just as it is possible to identify "colonial" perceptions and behavior surviving in a supposedly "post-colonial" society, so too one can identify "post-colonial" or emerging resistant features in "colonial" society (156).

The refusal of absolute distinctions between the notions of "colonial" and "post-colonial" is also evidenced in David Brookshaw's discussion of Mia Couto's portrayal of the multiplicity and complexity that characterize Mozambique through the characters in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* in "Indianos e o Índico: o pós-colonialismo transoceânico e internacional em *O Outro Pé da Sereia*":

> Todas as personagens correspondem inteiramente à ideia reiterada do autor de que a sociedade e cultura moçambicanas são muito mais complexas do que os estrangeiros, e a nova elite urbana "nacionalista", conseguem apreender. Tal como a luta de liberação começou ainda durante o regime colonial, também o colonialismo não terminou com a mera mudança de bandeiras (Brookshaw, 136).

Like Medeiros, Walder and Brookshaw highlight the need for more flexible and inclusive perspectives on the postcolonial condition, ones which simultaneously deal more closely with aspects of local history and culture, aiming at a global scope, but originating in a local point of view or specific local conditions. The several academic fields dealing with the postcolonial condition, including postcolonial literature, are faced with this challenge of reaching a balance between acknowledging the global status of postcolonial identities and the emphasis on particular aspects of local culture and history that inform them. Manuela Ribeiro Sanches alerts us to this circumstance marking the fields of postcolonial studies in the introductory chapter to *Portugal não é um país pequeno: contar o império na pós-colonialidade*:

> para além de uma condição pós-colonial marcada por estas tendências globais, há que assinalar as configurações que as diferentes identidades locais assumem, a forma como essas influências e os discursos a elas associados são também distintamente equacionados através de práticas culturais precisas que a generalização de conceitos e de experiências não permite entender. Por isso mesmo se afigura tanto mais premente uma reflexão sobre a pós-colonialidade a partir de um ponto de vista, de uma perspectiva localizada (…) (9).

Discussing the mutual implications discernible between postcolonial studies and the works produced by black writers in South Africa, Atwell concludes that the relationship is currently characterized by something of a compromise that considers both the inevitable globalization of the postcolonial academic field and the current emphasis placed on local history which has superseded the tendency toward generalization:

> Over the last few years, resistance to early assumptions that descriptions emanating from one kind of expressive culture can be generalised to others seems to have produced a general retreat, so that if there is consensus now, it is that the exigencies of the local and the historically specific need to be respected. There is no longer the chimera of a "postcolonial position", nor even a common theoretical tradition. However, while there may not be consensus, the globalisation of academic culture has seen to it that resources and ideas are being more widely distributed (…) In the globalised spaces of postcolonial studies, it seems possible to begin the comparative mapping rather more carefully now, given the increasing agreement on the need to respect local specificity (12-13).

In this context, the project of re-evaluating and rewriting local history assumes important features in African postcolonial literature as a direct response to colonial narratives and versions of history, which often disregarded local (for the most part unwritten) histories as myths or legends and tried to replace them with (often written) Eurocentric views. Recently, however, several theorists have drawn

attention to the potential risks associated with the project of re-covering local histories. In "The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory", Adam Ashforth raises significant issues with respect to the type of discourse to adopt in the process of rewriting the history of groups of people whose pasts lie mostly in the realm of orality, and whose histories were therefore written (and quite often misinterpreted or even manipulated) through a foreign, dominant discourse used by their oppressors, but which is, quite often, the only type of written discourse they know:

> This is the problem of writing a history of a process of colonial conquest in the terms and language of the victors, which does not simply replicate (…) the imperial encounter by translating the colonized people's experience into the terms of dominant discourses (590).

In addition to the difficulties in finding an appropriate discourse to narrate the past, Ogundele has discerned a strong inclination among most postcolonial works to focus almost exclusively on either the colonial past and its repercussions or on the demanding questions faced in the postcolonial present. Ogundele stresses the need to counter this tendency, for there is a vast and varied stock of pre-colonial histories waiting to be narrated:

> There is no disputing the fact that twentieth-century Africa is largely a product of nineteenth-century European commercial, political, and cultural adventurism on the continent. Whatever myths motivated it, the adventure resulted from a combination of the political, social, economic, cultural, and technological histories of Europe from the Renaissance on. The overwhelming attention paid to the multifaceted history of colonialism in African nationalist historiography and fictions is an indirect testimony to the brute reality, power, and complexity of those histories. But contemporary Africa is not the making of colonialism alone. Contemporary Africa is also a creation of the incomparably longer centuries of her own internal histories that no doubt played significant roles in how her different societies responded

> to European intrusions, and continue to influence postcolonial politics on the continent. (…) Colonialism repressed and distorted (…) internal histories but could not undo them (136).

Current perceptions of both history and fiction as articulating a partial and interested or situated vision of reality, owing principally to the influential work of Hayden White, convey pertinent viewpoints to the postcolonial project of re-assessing and rewriting local histories. In *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, White claims that history and fiction are similar as literary artifacts, since they share many characteristics in terms of discourse as well as in terms of structure of meaning (121). Kuisma Korhonen expands on the formal and representational parallels between history and fiction in the introductory chapter to *Tropes for the Past*:

> Both are interested in communicating a certain vision of reality, although writers of fiction may refer to this vision by the use of such figurative devices as the construction of the "fictional world" (events that one cannot necessarily verify or falsify) whereas historians refer to this reality by their constructions of the "real world" (events that one can verify or falsify). However, in one sense they are both fiction: the archetypal vision that they imply by their different textual devices and references cannot be verified or falsified – it is, in a way, fiction, something that is added to the world as it is (12).

It thus seems to follow that both historical and fictional discourses are an attempt at representing aspects of reality that are not wholly verifiable or attainable (although not necessarily entirely fictional either). As White explains in "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing", any discourse dealing with the past will inevitably be faced with a number of constraints associated with narrativization (such as the propensity for fictionalization and subjectivation), and with the impossibility of directly accessing its objects of study:

> (…)I have no doubt that discourse and especially historical discourse refers to objects and events in a real world – but would add that since these objects and events are no longer perceivable, they have to be constructed as possible objects of a possible perception rather than treated as real objects of real perceptions (30).

André Brink suggests in "Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative" that in order to overcome the difficulties of dealing with the historical past as a discourse, writers and readers might rely more on creativity and interpretation, respectively, rather than solely on verifiable facts:

> the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors – that is, tell stories – in which, not history, but imaginings of history are invented. Myth may have preceded history, but in the long run it may well be the only guarantee for the survival of history (42).

In Brink's vision, in their re-creations of history, postcolonial writers perform the role once attributed to oral storytellers, who were the only guardians of histories, whether real or imaginary:

> in the beginning, there was no history or literature: there were just tales, mythic narratives of the legendary past. It was a storyteller's duty to praise the ancestors, both real and divine, so that the contact between the past and the present was not broken (Korhonen, 9).

Another important feature associated with the re-assessment and re-creation of colonial texts is the recovery and assertion of postcolonial identities it allows. Intimately associated with the task of reinterpreting the past, this attempt at reconstructing postcolonial identities among contemporary African writers represents, according to Ana Mafalda Leite, a "demanda estratégica na qual os Africanos se colocaram simultaneamente em relação a um *ethos* africano, bem como em relação ao resto do mundo" (45). Searching for a sense of

identity that may overcome the effects of colonial discourses upon the colonized subjects does not imply, however, a complete rejection of foreign influences, which could result in the defense of an image of African "purity" rehearsed in the discussion over Négritude at an earlier stage of the re-examining process. Postcolonial theory and literature counter colonial discourses, which created artificial boundaries between colonizers and colonized on the basis of hierarchies of difference (linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic) and thus rejected many of the possibilities of exchange that might result from the cultural contacts facilitated by valorizing difference and transcultural contact:

> Difference thus ceases to be a barrier that irremediably separates me from the other and comes to be understood as the condition of redefined identity, permitting the mutual fecundation between the self and the alien (Fonseca, 45).

As a consequence, postcolonial writers' re-evaluation of colonial histories focuses on the task of recovering formerly repressed narratives, but its scope extends beyond a mere revision of historical facts, for, as Adam Ashforth points out,

> representations of the past are inextricably linked to the politics of identity among social groups in the present, especially when pasts previously accessible only through oral traditions and memory are inscribed in authoritative written texts (587).

In the process of scrutinizing and revisioning colonial versions of history, the attention given to particular cultural contexts through which historical events are interpreted and rewritten becomes as relevant as the re-assessment of particular historical events. This relates to the fact that not only historical events, but perhaps even more importantly, identities have been subject to the manipulation of colonial categories and structures, as Helen Gilbert and Joanne

Tompkins argue in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics*: "If history has conventionally determined the parameters of a past, it has also determined the positioning of the colonized subject within that past" (109). However, as Ashforth reasons, in their revisions of South Africa's history, contemporary writers of South African social history have rejected the tendency to generalize:

> the work of these scholars has been very much about writing the history of "people without history", and their politics both in writing and other action have been strongly committed to empowering the disenfranchised in the present through representing their past as a history of rational agency. This history has been written both against structuralist representations of Africans as passive bearers of structures of exploitation and racist versions of a history of progress premised upon notions of African backwardness (589).

While colonial texts frequently presented a unidimensional perspective of the colonized people's history and identity, throughout the complex task of deconstructing those narratives in the literature produced during the postcolonial period, various (at times even contradictory) voices and histories will be encountered and disclosed:

> Literature may expand the collective memory and responsibility, by casting light on repressed events, giving voice to the marginalised, the silenced, the forgotten; it may complicate any given national narrative by creating discontinuity and fragmentation, acknowledging a heritage of difference and defending the right to non-conformity; or it may counter imagined national ideals by voicing national acts of shame (Moslund, 25-26).

Bungaro calls for the disclosure of such controversial narratives, claiming these have often been avoided by postcolonial theorists as a result of the functional and globalized economy guiding the selection and circulation of postcolonial texts:

> A perception of postcolonial literature as part of a global contest against colonial hegemony does not take into account that this politics normally intersects with another type of politics, that is, "internal colonization". Writers critical of the colonial heritage simultaneously attack concepts and ideas within their local cultures that serve to reproduce and/or reinforce colonial frames of reference and practices in the guise of nationalist sentiment. Besides the inequalities produced by colonialism, there are other, older inequalities of race, caste, class and gender which must be investigated in our reading/teaching of literatures from these societies. Instead, postcolonial practices in the academy rarely engage with texts that deal with internal dissensions within a region. Scant attention is paid to unequal divisions of resources in postcolonial societies, aboriginal and settler relations, religious and ethnic turmoil, conflicting class interests within postcolonial political formations and international alliances forged by the new indigenous ruling classes, pre-colonial history (98).

Another very important aspect brought to the fore by postcolonial narratives is related to the critical representations of pre-colonial history, which might have been easily subject to manipulation by postcolonial writers in the sense of being presented as an idyllic past that would contrast with the many traumas brought by the subsequent colonizing period. This ability to look critically at one's past narratives and history becomes, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, a valuable feature that distances most postcolonial efforts of rewriting history from the narrowly biased colonial accounts:[7]

[7] Most colonial accounts entailed a Eurocentric view of the inhabitants of the territories to be colonized that not only disregarded key elements in native history and culture, but also contributed to the construction of a stereotyped portrayal of the colonized people as inferior human beings. There were some exceptions, however, as Walder points out: "From early on, some Europeans recognized the value of what their civilization was destroying, and some questioned, even opposed, the colonizing process. One of these was the conquistador turned priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1576), whose *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (first published in 1552) represented the first of many struggles by Christian missionaries and enlightened Europeans against the behavior of their compatriots abroad (…)" (29). Similarly, some postcolonial narratives may present a distorted or compromised view of the pre-colonial past. As Moslund explains: "Like any other representation of the past, literary renditions are not to be

> While these works invest significant historical value in what western discourse has erroneously relegated to the category of pre-history, they do not necessarily present a static or rarefied vision of their subjects. Rather than perpetuating misconceptions about the past by positing a harmonious pre-contact period in contrast to the fraught post-contact past and present, [post-colonial writers] also foreground the battles and disagreements that inevitably characterized the time before European invasion (110).

Establishing counter-narratives that challenge colonial narratives plays a crucial role in postcolonial literature because it sets an important point from which to assert postcolonial identities:

> This is where the importance of counter-histories becomes apparent; the histories that emerge when the objectified, the Othered, the oppressed assume the power of definition and assert realities, of past and present, that refute or challenge the master narrative. Whether counter histories take the form of historical revisionism, the recuperation of the silenced past, witness testimonies, biographical accounts or other attempts to counter the dictates of official scripts with alternative pasts, counter-histories involve a conscious attempt to regain the command of one's own reality (Moslund, 15-16).

In spite of the specificities pertaining to South African and Mozambican history and culture, in the novels of two of the most significant literary representatives of those Southern African nations, Zakes Mda and Mia Couto respectively, it is possible to observe similar perspectives regarding the recovery of cultural memories and histories and their contribution toward the construction, development and understanding of postcolonial identities. The connection between the complementary concepts of history and memory, which may be of

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applauded as passive reflections of historical events and must be read critically like all meaning-making systems" (25).

pertinence for postcolonial literature, is elucidated by José Mendes in "O desafio das identidades":

> Enquanto a história é uma referência ao mundo marcada pela denominação, preocupada com os sujeitos, com aquilo de que se fala, a memória é marcada pela descrição, pelos predicados, por uma qualificação dos acontecimentos e dos traços que deixou. Pelo estudo da memória temos um melhor acesso ao sentido de certos acontecimentos, a uma verdade intersubjectiva e não-referencial (…). A relação da história com a memória será, assim, não de oposição mas sim de complementariedade. A uma verdade de adequação que caracteriza a história só ganharemos em acrescentar a verdade de desvendamento característica da memória (500).

Through fiction, Zakes Mda and Mia Couto combine history's concern with concrete facts and memory's attachment to disclosure, opening important spaces to debate some of the most complex questions posed to African postcolonial identities. Beyond the distinctive political, cultural and historical contexts that have shaped South African and Mozambican literatures (which are briefly described in the next section and discussed in the ensuing chapters dedicated to specific works of the two writers), both Zakes Mda and Mia Couto assume in their novels the need to examine contemporary South African and Mozambican postcolonial identities by resorting to the reclamation of their historical memories. This need shared by the two writers might somehow relate to the episodes of violence that have marked both countries' histories and which, as Wole Soyinka reasons in the Introduction to *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, require scrutiny from the producers of literary works:

> The crimes that the African continent commits against her kind are of a dimension and, unfortunately, of a nature that appears to constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on that continent by others. There are moments when it almost appears as if there is a diabolical continuity (and inevitability?) to

> it all- that the conduct of latter-day (internal) slaverunners is merely the stubborn precipitate of a yet unexpiated past. The ancient slave stockades do not seem ever to have vanished; they appear more to have expanded, occupying indiscriminate spaces that often appear contingent with national boundaries. Thus, the role of memory, of ancient precedents of current criminality, obviously governs our responses to the immediate and often more savage assaults on our humanity, and to the strategies for remedial action. Faced with such a balancing imposition – the weight of memory against the violations of the present – it is sometimes useful to invoke the voices of the griots, the ancestral shades and their latter-day interpreters, the poets (19-20).

Reassessing history in their attempts to rewrite it, contemporary postcolonial writers are challenging the "normalized" discourse of history as an uncontested assembly of information about past events and often turning their attention to relatively obscure and polemical aspects of their nations' pasts that are transposed to contemporary contexts, allowing a critical analysis of past and present circumstances. In this, they bear witness to Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee's consideration on memorialist writing in their Introduction to *Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa*:

> It (…) remains as a challenge to all who are, in some way, memorializing the past to keep multiple versions of the past alive and not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity, at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance (14).

In the context of black South African literature, Zakes Mda's post-apartheid novels[8] represent an important shift of focus from a period marked by pressing questions concerning resistance to apartheid to a

[8] The term "post-apartheid" is used here bearing in mind the fact that all of Mda's novels have been published after 1994 (the publishing date of the first two, *She Plays with the Darkness* and *Ways of Dying* is 1995). Additionally, the designation "post-apartheid novels" also highlights a distinction from Mda's earlier apartheid period plays in terms of themes and concerns (a more detailed differentiation between these two stages in Mda's literary career will be developed in Chapter 2).

post-apartheid period that required black literature to change, as Atwell explains,

> from an emphasis on how to write about sameness and difference, to writing about *temporality*, which is to say, writing about one's place in history or one's place in the present and future (8, italics in the original).

In Mda's novels, the attention given to the historical dimension of plot and characters is accompanied by pronounced elements of performance, possibly influenced by his previous experience as a playwright. David Bell and J.U.Jacobs state in the Introduction to *Ways of Writing* that performative traits can be discerned at a narrative level in Mda's novels, whether in the frequent use of a communal narrator, or in Mda's particular use of magical realism, both strongly influenced by African storytelling:

> At a deeper narrative level, however, Mda's fictional works are performative in ways that go to the essence of his art and its roots in African narrative forms and ontology. Mda has consistently drawn attention to the African origins of his art (7).

For Atwell, Mda resorts to different modes of social and aesthetic performance as a response to the oppressive historical contexts South Africa has been confronted with:

> The point is, Mda renders history – colonialism, apartheid – as a process of creeping death that necessitates modes of aesthetic production – the professional mourner, the dancer, *ritual*, in general – which are offered as sources of hope. Mda pits stylised aesthetic humanism against historically-induced death (195, italics in the original).

Besides the mourning rituals created and performed by Toloki in *Ways of Dying*, Bell and Jacobs indicate a number of other ritualized performances depicted in other of Mda's novels:

> Performance is most obviously foregrounded in his fictional narratives in the form of social ceremonies or festivals – the various funeral rituals in *Ways of Dying*; the customary social gatherings of the Basotho people, with their traditional dances in *She Plays with the Darkness*; the Xhosa tradition of split-tone singing in *The Heart of Redness*; the Ficksburg Cherry Festival in *The Madonna of Excelsior*; the Kalfiefees in Hermanus when the Southern Right Whales arrive annually to give birth in *The Whale Caller*; and the Court Street Halloween parade that frames the narrative in *Cion* (7).

According to Rogier Courau and Sally-Ann Murray in "Of Funeral Rites and Community Memory: Ways of Living in *Ways of Dying*", Toloki's performances as a Professional Mourner in *Ways of Dying* become a strong symbol of community memory. Through his mourning performances the character of Toloki connects not just the realms of the living and the dead, inevitably stressing the prevalence of death during the transition period, but also bringing the community together in its fight for survival:

> In Mda's narrative, ideas of community and history are expressed and entrenched through the performance of the funeral ritual and the macabre shadows of death and murder that frame it. Whether considered within an explicit political context or in relation to the confusions of socio-political change, these processes of mourning, of finding ways of living by enacting the memory of the dead, carry with them the weight of a turbulent and often distorted history (92).

Examining how apartheid has deeply affected South African literature in "The Republic of Letters after the Mandela Republic", Lewis Nkosi notes that because of its long history of pain and suffering, there is an almost complete absence of nostalgia in the

literature produced in South Africa, which explains the lack of attention from literature to the nation's past: "Instead of being eternally bathed in a pleasant glow of nostalgia, the past in South Africa is remembered mainly as a bad nightmare fomented by wars of conquests and resistance" (250). The post-apartheid years, however, seem to have established new conditions especially for black South African writers, who have begun to look at a more distant past in their works:

> After years of writing fiction that was firmly meted in the present, responding to the daily offences of government policy under apartheid, black writers seem suddenly fascinated by something more distant: the history of colonialism, attempting to discover for each ethnic group the moments of its deepest trauma and the modes of its transformation into present relations (Nkosi, 252).

Setting the two narratives that constitute *The Heart of Redness* around two crucial historical moments of redefinition for the Xhosa community, namely 1856, the year of the "Cattle-Killing Movement" in the Eastern Cape, and 1998, only four years after the first democratic elections in the country, representing, according to Atwell "high water marks in the definition of agency in black historical and cultural identity" (10), Mda's novel confirms Nkosi's arguments, as the struggle years are relegated to the background (they are mentioned in the novel as the time of "the Middle Generations"). *The Heart of Redness* focuses instead on the relationships the black community has had to establish with challenges posed by issues of modernity in the two historical moments. In "The Xhosa Cattle-Killing and Post-Apartheid South Africa: Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*", Renée Schatteman argues that even though under apparently distinctive circumstances, the question of choice between maintenance of tradition or reliance on

development, highlighted by the juxtaposition of the two narratives in the novel, is the central subject with respect to which the novel unfolds:

> Parallels between the community's past and present are enhanced by the novel's narrative structure in which the two story lines are spliced and interwoven throughout. Most obviously, the crisis the Xhosa faced because of aggressive colonial expansion in the nineteenth century is tied to the struggles of contemporary South Africans who must contend with elements of class privilege, neo-colonial greed, and international globalisation that have emerged since the collapse of apartheid. The options the community had in each time period appear to be essentially the same – to search for solutions to the crisis within a traditional framework or to reject tradition as outdated and even damaging and place faith in the notion and the agents of progress instead (284).

Contrasting with the majority of black literary works published during the apartheid period, which for political and cultural reasons conformed to realistic conventions, Mda's novel, which opens an important space for renovation, is enthusiastically described by Atwell as

> multi-voiced and multi-disciplinary, an elaborately colourful, allegorical, historiographic mural, infused with the freeing of representational energy that the post-apartheid moment seems to promise (196).

Many writers and critics including Nkosi have long assumed the existence, particularly during the apartheid era, of a split between the resort to experimentalism and postmodernism mainly by white South African writers and the strong need to expose and document, supported by realism, among black South African writers. Analyzing the possible motives and consequences of that contrast for the works produced by black writers in "Postmodernism and black writing in South Africa", Nkosi argues that black literature has also been subject

to a kind of colonization, in the shape of cultural and educational neglect, which resulted in its impoverishment when compared to the literature produced by the culturally privileged white writers:

> it is important to trace much of the backwardness of black writing to its state of internal isolation and surveillance under the apartheid regime and some of its disabilities to wounds inflicted by cultural deprivation and social neglect (Nkosi, 79).

More recently, critics such as Atwell in *Rewriting Modernity* have contested such a linear polarity by giving examples of experimentalism, though still sparse and inchoate, in black contemporary writing. While not agreeing totally with Nkosi's positions, Atwell nevertheless recognizes that they have led the way to a serious discussion of how to deal with postmodernism in black fiction (171). Nkosi has very wisely pointed out that it should be the black writers' decision whether or not to make use of experimentalism as a valuable tool in their works. Moreover, he has stressed that if black writers choose to adopt any kind of experimentalism, it will be on their own terms, and not as an attempt to emulate Western literatures. The intense political and social changes South Africa has undergone after the establishment of democracy have naturally also had repercussions in literature, especially for black writers, who now have more freedom to experiment and engage with new themes and perspectives.[9] For

[9] Among the new generation of post-apartheid black novelists, two figures have stood out for their talent, choice of controversial issues and legacy to South African literature, in spite of their untimely and almost simultaneous deaths: K.Sello Duiker and Phaswane Mpe. Sam Raditlhalo laments the premature loss of such promising genius in "'The Travelling Salesman' – A tribute to K. Sello Duiker: 1974-2005": "The rare talent each possessed was a hope that we shall not realise. They left behind priceless delineations of a post-apartheid South Africa awakening to its infinite, if uncertain, futures" (96). Duiker's first novel *Thirteen Cents*, published in 2000, won the 2001 debut award of the Commonwealth Prize for the Africa region. The novel focuses on the violence faced by street kids living in Cape Town. His

Njabulo Ndebele, an important contribution to that process of renovation in literature stemmed from the institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, which enabled the telling of hitherto inaudible stories, as he enunciates in "Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative":

> What seems to have happened is that the passage of time which brought forth our freedom has given legitimacy and authority to previously silenced voices. It has lifted the veil of secrecy and state-induced blindness. Where the state sought to hide what it did, it compelled those who were able to see what was happening not to admit the testimony of their own eyes. In this connection, the stories of the TRC represent a ritualistic lifting of the veil and the validation of what was actually seen. They are an additional confirmation of the movement of our society from repression to expression (…) These stories may very well be some of the first steps in the rewriting of South African history on the basis of validated mass experience (20).

Behind the multiple objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings lies the compelling desire to inscribe the previously private narratives of suffering into the public project of nation-building.[10] Soyinka underlines the exposition of those stories

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second novel, published in 2001, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, deals with controversial issues that had until then been avoided by black writers, namely homosexuality and mental illness. A third novel, *The Hidden Star*, was published posthumously. Phaswane Mpe published only one novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* in 2001, in which he describes the struggle of urban black South Africans to create a post-apartheid identity after the collapse of apartheid and their confrontation with new social ills, including unemployment, poverty, immigration and HIV/AIDS.

[10] The multiplicity of goals behind the setting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is emphasized by Steven Robbins in "'Can't forget, can't remember': reflections on the cultural afterlife of the TRC": "it could be argued that the TRC was many things at once, a hybrid institution that had multiple and at times contradictory aims, agendas and modes of operation; for example, it was simultaneously (1) a Christian-based morality tale, (2) a model for achieving national reconciliation; (3) a public archive, (4) a partisan ANC quest for political legitimacy and (5) a nation-building project, co-authored by theologians, politicians, lawyers and historians, (6) a legal mechanism for providing amnesty for apartheid-era government and military officials, and so on (146-147).

as a crucial factor in establishing the foundations of the new stage the nation has just entered:

> Beyond Truth, the very process of its exposition becomes part of the necessity, and, depending on the nature of the past it addresses, the impact it has made on the lives of the citizens and the toll it has taken on their sense of belonging, it may be regarded as being capable of guaranteeing or foundering the future of a nation. Indeed, it may be seen as a therapy against civic alienation (12).

By placing the personal memory in the public sphere, the stories told at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings have contributed towards the process of writing a collective memory, as Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph stresses in "Re-Placing Pasts, Forgetting Presents: Narrative, Place, and Memory in the Time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission":[11]

> As a cornerstone of the new South African democracy's project of nation-building, the TRC has, of course, mediated and framed individual trauma rooted in individual bodies in ways that subsume the individual into a homogeneous and disembodied

[11] This manipulation of individual accounts for the purpose of the nation-building project has given rise to some criticism, as it has underlined "the conflicting interests of individuals who have testified and the overarching operations of the TRC as a state institution mostly to the detriment of individual witness" (Grunebaum-Ralph, 198). For the sake of creating a consensual collective history, some personal pretensions (in terms of justice) may have been overlooked. Despite acknowledging, as has already been seen, positive aspects behind the goals of the TRC, Soyinka criticizes its lack of a search for concrete reparations for the victims of apartheid. Soyinka questions whether a search for truth without a demand for restitution can be effective: "There are many implications for a policy – of which South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an instrument – for which there appears to be no built-in mechanism for a mandatory reciprocity. Knowledge, or information, is, however, a social virtue that carries a potential for prevention or social alertness, and this may actually counterbalance the risks inherent in a project that appears to dispense with the principle of restitution in historic accounting. But is knowledge on its own of lasting effect? Or is it simply that memory is short?" (8-9). It is generally agreed, however, that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has successfully initiated a vitally important public dialogue concerning the effects of a traumatic past, being often presented as a model for other countries going through the same situation of dealing with dramatic past events:"In few countries do we have a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative" (Ndebele, "Memory", 27)

> narrative of collectivity. This collectivity has been framed in terms of a common collective memory and instrumentalized in the name of the "new nation" (198).

In the new era inaugurated by the first fully democratic elections in South Africa, the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission triggered important discussions of how past and present can relate, and particularly of how the transition from the past to the present can best be approached in order to contribute positively to the building of a post-apartheid nation,

> both in the politically constituted republic which came into being with the inauguration of Mandela as the first president of a freely elected democratic government on the one side and the republic of letters on the other which exists, presumably, parallel to the political republic, one interacting with the other (Nkosi, "The Republic", 240).

Indeed, as Ronit Fainman-Frenkel argues in "Ordinary Secrets and the Bounds of Memory: Traversing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Farida Karodia's *Other Secrets* and Beverley Naidoo's *Out of Bounds*", the important questions the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has raised for South African society in relation to narrative, memory, history and truth were transposed to the literature produced after the demise of apartheid:[12]

[12] Though associated with the ability to remember things past, memory is a not a neutral means of bringing the past into the present, but a complex sociological process. In "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic", Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins distinguish between the concepts of autobiographical memory, historical memory and collective memory, and how they connect with the more distant past portrayed by history: "Autobiographical memory is memory of those events that we ourselves experience, while historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records. History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an 'organic' relation – the past that is no longer an important part of our lives – while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities. Memory inevitably gives way to history as we lose touch with our pasts. Historical memory, however, can be either organic or dead: We can celebrate even what we did not directly experience, keeping the given past alive for us, or it can be alive only in historical records, so-called graveyards of knowledge" (111).

> The past uncovered by the TRC, while only a partial account, forms the cornerstone of the continually unfolding process of historical narratives in post-Apartheid South Africa. The TRC can be read as establishing a relationship between individual narrative or memory (the basis of testimony) and communal narrative or history (composed in part from the collection of these testimonies). The opening of narrative space and the eschewal of certain oppositions (such as insider/outsider, public/private,history/fiction, memory/story, silence/articulation) are therefore central in terms of the theoretical shifts that the TRC has engendered – shifts that can be seen in contemporary post-Apartheid narratives (…) (54).

In societies which have undergone painful processes of oppression, the recalling of memory and history through narrative is often resorted to as a means of recovery, in its double meaning of healing and retrieval. However, as Grunebaum-Ralph points out in her analysis of the relations between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, narrative and memory, while the individual enunciation of past memories is an important step in the process of healing from a traumatic past, the movement from individual to collective memory implies forgetting as well as remembering:

> In the passage from the personal to the collective, what has to be forgotten is as significant as what is remembered. In the light of this forgetting, the metaphoricity of the notion of recovery is important. In the language of recovery and healing, buried pasts are recovered, and individuals begin to convalesce. But re-covery also contains the sense of a covering again, of a reburial, a concealment. The recovery of the past within the context of creating a consensual public history would then also be a containment of the possibilities of individual remembrances within that context (199-200).

One of the most difficult challenges posed to societies facing processes of transition after incidents of mass violence, as in the case

of post-apartheid South Africa, involves the complex attempt to reconcile memory and forgiveness. In the Introduction to *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*, Martha Minow outlines the question as a rather problematic contest between either too much or too little past:

> How to treat the continuing presence of perpetrators, and victims, and bystanders, after the violence has ended is a central problem, or better put, series of problems. A common formulation posits the two dangers of wallowing in the past and forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgment of the past's staging of the present; these joined dangers accompany not just societies emerging from mass violence, but also individuals recovering from trauma (2).

Zakes Mda has also admitted that the attempt to find a balance between the need to forgive and the risk to forget has become a major concern, deserving attentive scrutiny, not only from literary works, but from South African society, so as to avoid extreme attitudes such as revenge or the desire to obliterate:[13]

[13] According to Schatteman, Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* stands out from other works that also portray the transition period from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, because it rejects a complete separation between the notions of guilt and innocence: "*Mother to Mother* ultimately transcends rhetoric of culpability and blame and moves to a higher plane of understanding where it provides insights into the complexities of a nation struggling to come to terms with its violent past and to chart a path towards it [sic] future" (278). Some critics, troubled by the novel's refusal to overtly acknowledge guilt, have accused Magona of perpetuating an image of political victimization concerning the black population. For Schatteman, the novel's epistolary format, which allows the perpetrator's mother to expose her feelings and life-story directly to the victim's mother, appears to correspond to the TRC's global goals of reconciliation, via the promotion of dialogue. However, the novel presents an alternative way of understanding violence under apartheid by focusing mostly on the perspective of the perpetrator, and the motives behind his violent deed, thereby challenging the commonly undisputed binaries victim/perpetrator, guilt/innocence and the need for closure, ultimately unsettling its readers: "In fact, *Mother to Mother* is characterised by a palpable sense of unease since it refuses to satisfy the need for culpability. But its

> It is not easy, but we must forgive the past. But at the same time I think it is crucial not to forget the past. (…) Only history can teach us that, only memory, providing of course we are capable of learning from history. In many instances we tend to forget those lessons that history gives us and we repeat the same mistakes over and over again. But it is our hope that by remembering what happened we will not be the new perpetrators, which is very possible (Kachuba).

In "Notas Sobre a Ficção e a História em João Paulo Borges Coelho", Rita Chaves describes how a memorialist trend attempting to retrieve formerly repressed stories has also taken place in the contexts of postcolonial Mozambican and Angolan literature:

> O aparecimento de tantos textos memorialísticos nos últimos anos em países como Moçambique e como Angola faz pensar na necessidade que os protagonistas da sua história sentem de oferecer novas leituras, com todos os riscos que esses exercícios implicam. A emergência dessa vertente reflete a tendência de oferecer novos aportes à construção da história desses povos que foram durante séculos silenciados pela dominação estrangeira (197).

Regardless of their limitations and partiality, these attempts at recalling the past in narrative form via memory and history offer, according to Ndebele, vital instances of reflection about a nation's history, not so much in the sense of a succession of events, but regarding the people and the stories that have composed that history:

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satisfaction does emerge in the deeper explanations it offers by transcending polarities and interpreting violence from a complex understanding of South Africa's national story" (283).

> Is it not that we often think of stories as imaginary events which we may call tales, fiction, fables, or legends: stories as narratives of one kind or another? Yet, the testimonies we continue to hear at TRC hearings are the recall of memory. What is being remembered actually happened. If today they sound like imaginary events is because, as we shall recall, the horror of day-to-day life under apartheid often outdid the efforts of the imagination to reduce it to metaphor.
> But time seems to have rescued the imagination. Time has given the recall of memory the power of reflection associated with narrative. Isn't it that there is something inherently reflective about memory, as there is about narrative? If so, narratives of memory, in which real events are recalled, stand to guarantee us occasions for some serious moments of reflection. Hopefully it is this reflective capacity, experienced as a shared social consciousness, that will be that lasting legacy of the stories of the TRC (19-20).

In "(Re)escrever a História Através da Estória", Ana Benito claims that questions of identity underlie the connections between history and literature in contemporary Mozambican narrative:

> Explica-se assim, nessa construção da identidade, uma tendência tão significativa da actual literatura africana que consiste no trabalho de interpretação do passado, o seu funcionamento e a sua projecção no presente através de mediações de diferentes tipos: metafóricas, simbólicas e alegóricas. Daí a interdependência que existe entre a História e a Literatura no contexto da literatura africana (234).

In Mozambique, as indeed in other postcolonial locations, even very different ones such as Australia, literature has played a crucial role in the construction of postcolonial national identities. In the words of Nelson Saúte, Mozambican literature might be seen as having constituted "uma missão histórica de construção da nação moçambicana, da identidade nacional" (225). Furthermore, when analysing the passage from a colonial vision to a national one in Mozambican literature in "Literaturas Emergentes, Identidades e Cânone", Fátima Mendonça identifies three stages that correspond to

how Mozambican writers have positioned themselves in relation to their cultural, historical and political identities. A first stage she designates as "Ser Africano e Ser Europeu"(22) corresponds to the early writings published mainly by a restricted group of educated Africans – "assimilados"[14]- during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Even though critics like Pires Laranjeira (see Laranjeira, *Literaturas Africanas de Expressão Portuguesa*, 256) argue that Mozambican literature only started after the Second World War, previously to that historical period there were already some published literary works, mainly in the newspapers founded by João Albasini, *O Africano* (1908-1918) and *O Brado Africano* (1918-1974).[15] During this period João Albasini also wrote the first Mozambican work of fiction, *O Livro da Dor*, posthumously published in 1929. Another relevant figure of this period is poet Rui de Noronha, whose work was deeply influenced by Portuguese aesthetic models, but who was nevertheless already dealing thematically with particular aspects of Mozambican history and society (see Ferreira, "*Traduzindo*

[14] In "Tópicos para uma História da Literatura Moçambicana", Ana Mafalda Leite briefly summarizes the concept of "assimilação" in the Portuguese colonies in Africa: "A assimilação, enquanto suporte ideológico da política colonial, pode ser definida, em traços gerais, como um conjunto de acções sistemáticas ditas de transmissão de cultura e de civilização ao povo colonizado, levando-o a abandonar os seus valores culturais originais e a assumir uma postura mais conforme com os valores europeus, para daí gozar do direito à plena cidadania portuguesa" (Leite, 57). Even though in its imposition of European cultural and linguistic systems, this policy might be seen as an instrument of colonial domination, it became one of the most important contributions, through the access it enabled to formal education, toward the establishment of a national literature in Mozambique. Not only did the policy fail to create an élite of Africans who would participate in colonial projects, it eventually allowed that élite to use cultural aspects imposed upon them, such as the Portuguese language, in order to assert their Mozambican identity, as Maria Fernanda Afonso explains in *O Conto Moçambicano*: "o Estado colonial esperava criar uma elite de assimilados que realizaria com sucesso os seus projectos imperialistas, mas na realidade produziu um ser híbrido que, face à hegemonia de uma outra cultura, aprendeu a reivindicar a sua, tomando em mão as armas que lhe eram oferecidas" (124).

[15] The Mozambican press will play a decisive role not only in the formation of a national literature, as the main site for the publication of literary works, but also in the development of a national awareness through the denunciation of colonial oppression (see Afonso, 121-126).

Mundos: Os mortos na narrativa de Mia Couto", 17). Literature produced and published in this stage was revealing of the identity conflict Mozambican "assimilados" faced, torn between an African and a European world, neither of which they felt they belonged entirely to. In order to obtain certain citizenship rights, such as education and access to certain jobs, through the category of "assimilados", Mozambicans of African descent had become acculturated subjects, as they were forced to reject African cultural values and to adopt instead European cultural patterns and the Portuguese language. This acculturation process became evident in their writings, for they did not question colonialism, even though they criticized some of its negative aspects, and did not assume a nationalist conscience, in spite of defending the rights of the African population. These conflicts and contradictions are described by Francisco Noa in "Literatura Moçambicana: os trilhos e as margens":

> Todas estas figuras, além de oscilarem do ponto de vista identitário, flutuam entre duas margens: por um lado, uma intervenção cívica e política, através da imprensa, com artigos de opinião, editoriais e crónicas, muitas vezes de uma acutilância e de virulência devastadoras.
> Por outro lado, a sua flutuação, numa pantomima involuntária e dramática de contradições, espraiava-se na forma como acabavam por legitimar aquilo que aparentemente denunciavam e combatiam. Isto é, tanto pugnavam pelos interesses dos africanos com quem se identificavam, como eram capazes de calorosamente reivindicar a sua condição ou a sua aspiração à cidadania portuguesa (37-38).

The second stage, labelled "Ser Africano *vs* Ser Europeu" (22), witnessed a greater variety in terms of literary production, but it is recognized principally by a vast lyrical production connected to the periodical *Itinerário* in the 1940s and 1950s, and which was deeply influenced by Négritude and other Black literary and political movements. Poets of this stage include, among others, Noémia de

Sousa, Rui Nogar, Rui Knopfli, Orlando Mendes and José Craveirinha. The lyrical works produced by this generation are viewed by many critics as the first to affirm a sense of "moçambicanidade":

> Esta geração será a grande responsável pela construção da imagem da moçambicanidade ao adoptar estratégias deliberadas (…), na afirmação de uma identidade própria que se consuma na forma como se processa a recepção, adaptação, transformação, prolongamento e contestação de modelos e influências literárias (Noa, 39).

This national awareness was not only visible in literary terms, but in political and identity terms as well. Still influenced by European and South American (mostly Brazilian) aesthetic models, these poets nevertheless distance themselves from the colonial literature produced at the time, and which insisted on the perpetuation of the image of Africans as subaltern subjects. Denouncing the various types of manipulation produced under colonial domination and also resorting to local aesthetic strategies, such as oral literature, these poets try to assert a Mozambican national and literary identity. Even though dominated by lyrical production, this period also saw the publication of the first Mozambican prose works, which will become much more common in the subsequent post-independence period. The first Mozambican collection of short stories, *Godido e Outros Contos*, by João Dias, was published posthumously in 1952. It is, however, another collection of short stories, *Nós Matámos o Cão Tinhoso*, by Luís Bernardo Honwana, published in 1964, which is regarded as the "texto inaugural da prosa moçambicana" (Afonso, 136). In 1969 this anthology became the first work of fiction from Lusophone Africa to be published in the fulcral Heinemann "African Writers Series" collection with the title *We Killed Mangy Dog*. The first Mozambican novel*, Portagem*, by Orlando Mendes, was published in 1966.

The last stage, which corresponds to the postcolonial period, is named by Mendonça as "Ser Nacional *vs* Ser Universal" (22). For most critics, this period finally affirms Mozambican literature as a recognized and autonomous literary system. The quantity, quality and diversity of literary works produced and published in Mozambique during the 1980s become crucial factors for that literary affirmation. A talented generation of writers associated with the AEMO ("Associação de Escritores Moçambicanos", established in 1982 to promote Mozambican literature), and grouped around important literary magazines such as *Charrua* and the section "Gazeta de Letras e Artes" from the magazine *Tempo*, and which included writers such as Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, Eduardo White and Suleiman Cassamo, among others, would bring Mozambican literature

> não só uma multívoca pluralidade de posturas estilísticas e de linguagens na ficção, como haveria de contribuir com a diversidade, o arrojo e a experimentação que estão na base de alguma da melhor literatura nascente (Saúte, 14).

More distant from the pressing political concerns of the previous stage, aspects such as a critical reflection about the country's past and present history, as well as a constant hesitation between the recovery of traditional cultural values and the influence of modernity, exacerbated by the phenomenon of globalization, upon those values, become major focuses of discussion for these writers. The discussion concerning identity issues, which pervades all stages of Mozambican literature, becomes particularly emphatic in this period, as postcolonial Mozambican writers struggle to find their own voices amidst African and European cultural influences, which they nonetheless look at critically. The multifarious and complex questions associated with postcolonial Mozambican identities are made visible in

dualistic relationships that Mozambican writers explore in their writings:

> Ser dividido como é, o escritor africano projecta a problemática da identidade num conjunto de pares, nomeadamente passado/presente, velho/novo, tradição/modernidade, ruralidade/urbanidade, Ficção/História e oralidade/escrita, símbolos, só por si, dos mundos múltiplos e dos fenómenos sincréticos que marcam estas literaturas. Por isso, eles não são dicotómicos, mas reveladores de relações complexas de complementaridade que recusam esquemas mentais dualistas (Ferreira, 42).

The interconnections between past and present, fiction and history become increasingly important for postcolonial Mozambican writers in their effort to rewrite updated versions of the Mozambican past from a critical perspective, thus avoiding a skewed opposition to past historical narratives or the indiscriminate recovery of anything considered traditional. For Benito, these unbiased insights into the past carried out in the present times will have their repercussions upon the future of Mozambican history and literature:

> No entanto, a história que se textualiza já não é a celebração do passado, porque não se trata simplesmente de evocar o passado, mas a sua explicitação, o seu questionamento para que funcione como factor intrínseco ao presente. Trata-se de usar a história passada para criar o futuro (235).

Past memories are recovered as part of the endeavour to create a space of discussion that will allow the intersection of different (and sometimes) differing perspectives, stimulated by cultural hybridity and critical analysis. In societies that were previously subject to some form of repression, "naming the past and the present carries the promise and the opportunity of envisioning and making other future realities possible in which one can exercise one's right to influence" (Moslund, 16). As Gilbert and Tompkins explain, this questioning of

past narratives in contemporary Mozambican literature is intimately connected to the desire to reconstruct postcolonial identities:

> By establishing counter-narratives and counter-contexts which refute, or at least decentre, orthodox versions of history, marginalized cultures insist on a more equitable and representative starting point from which to negotiate a post-colonial identity (111).

Moreover, this countering of official narratives by previously muted voices transforms literature into a privileged space for the discussion of the multi-layered history and culture of Mozambican subjects. In the context of Mozambican postcolonial literature Mia Couto has become, through his prolific and varied literary and non-literary works, one of the most notable contributors to the debate concerning the construction of national identities. In "Revolução e Identidades Nacionais em Moçambique: diálogos (in)confessados", André José stresses Mia Couto's ability to articulate both creatively and critically the dynamics of multiplicity that characterize Mozambican identities in his works:

> Não se bastando com a mera intermediação de sentidos, Mia Couto afirma-se como um interlocutor importante no processo de construção da identidade nacional, tanto porque, contra a tendência da homogeneização das experiências, põe em diálogo e em confronto os diversos elementos identitários em presença, como também porque projecta, para o país e para o mundo, uma ideia de moçambicanidade e de cidadania. Longe de (re)criar identidades essencialistas, cristalizadas no tempo e no espaço, Mia Couto é fiel à historicidade, complexidade e dinâmicas que lhes são próprias (150-151).

Aware of the complex historical and cultural dynamics attendant upon Mozambican identities, in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* Mia Couto ventures into the little explored (not only in the scope of his literary work, but in Mozambican literature as a whole) context of early colonial

Mozambique.[16] As David Brookshaw explains, the setting of the historical narrative of the novel stresses the existence of intricate economic and cultural movements between people of different geographical, ethnic, linguistic and religious origins around the Indian Ocean already during pre-colonial times:

> o autor recorre agora a um passado mais remoto de Moçambique: a origem colonial primordial, uma vez que a grande complexidade da sociedade moçambicana e do centro da sua cultura afro-euro-indiana (a área do Vale do Zambeze) data desse período, quando a colónia foi estabelecida e administrada basicamente por Goa (136).

Recovering an obscure episode from that historical and geographical setting - the murder of Portuguese Jesuit D. Gonçalo da Silveira in 1561, during his mission in the Empire of the Monomotapa - inevitably prompts criticism of some aspects of the Portuguese

[16] Another contemporary Mozambican writer who has focused on pertinent aspects of Mozambique's history in his short, yet prolific and diversified literary career (since 2003 he has published four novels, two volumes of short stories and a novella) is historian João Paulo Borges Coelho. As for the two types of writing he pursues, as a historian and as a novelist, João Paulo Borges Coelho admits in "Escrita Académica, Escrita Literária" that in his case, there is not a very strong delimitation between history and literature: "Olhando para trás, para o que escrevi em ambos os campos, sinto que muitas vezes defini muito tenuamente as fronteiras entre as duas práticas. Ou seja, os meus textos académicos têm um 'deslize' literário (sempre tive uma dimensão romanesca da história, o que poderá até ser um defeito) e, por outro lado, a minha literatura dificilmente existiria sem a história e a geografia. O meu primeiro romance partiu directamente de anotações para um texto académico" (233). Susana Ramos Ventura expounds on the historical periods he has selected for his works in "Considerações sobre a obra ficcional de João Paulo Borges Coelho": "o tempo enfocado tem ênfase na contemporaneidade, mas no que vamos chamar de uma 'contemporaneidade alargada', uma vez que analepses costumam retomar todo o período de ocupação mais efectiva dos portugueses, a partir da última década do século XIX (*As visitas do dr. Valdez*) e períodos anteriores (como em alguns dos contos e também em *As duas sombras do rio*, que refere claramente o período de 1729 a 1820 e episódios de lutas ocorridas em 1886, 1888; além da descrição da linhagem de uma família de exploradores portugueses que remonta a 1750)" (49). In October 2009, João Paulo Borges Coelho was awarded the "Prémio Leya" for the unpublished manuscript of *O Olho de Hertzog*, a novel focusing on the conflicts opposing the German and the Portuguese and British Armies at the frontier between Mozambique and South Africa during World War I.

colonizing project in that area of southern Africa.[17] Some of the originality of Couto's narrative, however, lies in the countering of the image of pre-colonial Mozambique as static and pristine:

> In contrast to most of the historical novels about African's early contacts with Europeans produced during the anti-colonial struggle, however, Couto's rewriting of this historical episode does not aim explicitly at exposing and condemning the depredations of Portugal's 400-year-old empire. It stakes no unequivocal claim to know the "truth" about this history. In the end, the gap that separates the novel's representation of this past from historical truth remains unbridgeable (Madureira, 213-214).

The same way that sixteenth century and contemporary Mozambique are portrayed in the two narratives in Couto's novel as settings where several cultural, religious and linguistic identities intersect, history and fiction are not asserted in the novel as separate entities, but as crucial intersecting aspects for a deeper understanding of the past and present of the country that goes beyond simplistic dichotomies and therefore does not deny the hybridity and complexity of Mozambican identities. In an interview with Elena Brugioni, transcribed in her doctoral thesis, Couto stresses the importance of revising and rewriting history by opening it to multiple personal stories and perspectives:

> será que a história que nós aprendemos hoje nos manuais escolares, em toda a África, não só em Moçambique, não deixa de fora aquilo que no fundo seria o mais rico, que seria o resgate daquilo que é o nosso lado humano: as pessoas que tiveram medo, as pessoas que traíram, as pessoas que namoraram e às vezes com o inimigo. Em suma, aquilo que não é a redução a uma coisa política, bipolar e que responde a uma demarcação

[17] In *África Negra: História e Civilizações*, Elikia M'Bokolo describes the Empire of the Monomotapa as a political unity of great dimension in the southernmost region of Africa, not only for its wide geographical extension, but principally because its proximity to the Indian Ocean transformed it into a center of intense commercial exchange, initially dominated by Arabs and later on by Europeans (162-179).

> absoluta de um território. Houve coisas que se cruzaram, houve trocas (xi).

Both Couto and Mda assume in their novels the need to retrieve people and not only facts from the realms of history and to rewrite them into stories, a challenge that is also faced by contemporary historians, who, according to Ashforth, have repeatedly questioned academic notions commonly associated with historiography such as the status of truth and facts, and are recentering their writings upon narrative subjectivity and dialogue with their subjects of study:

> The dialogue I have in mind, then, is one in which other ways of storying the past are not just treated as sources of data and clues for a true (dissertation style?) written history, but are presumed to have an authority that needs to be interpreted in its own terms and from which we might have much to learn. (…)
> In other words, such a historical project would not be one of "giving a voice", but rather of listening to the voices that are there (…) and learning from them, not just about them (591).

Among his arguments in favour of the use of imagination in the process of rewriting history, Brink mentions three characteristics of story as opposed to history that stress subjectivity as a strong point in the exploration of the silences of the past pursued in their works by African postcolonial writers like Mda and Couto. In the first place, Brink underlines that "in opposition to the usually more public narratives of history (…), story explores a situation from the inside, or internalizes what passes for facts in the public domain" (38). As will be observed more closely in the following chapters, Mda and Couto do not endorse official public versions of history in their novels, but rather seek to present personal insights into historical events. Secondly, according to Brink, "story does not presume to bring to light 'the' truth, but at most a version of it" (39). Mda and Couto's novels analysed in this work present not just one, but various

perspectives on historical events, without privileging one perspective over the other and allowing readers to make their own interpretations. Thirdly, Brink states that story is inevitably "infused with, and transformed by, the notoriously unreliable complex of private motivations (…) and conditionings that constitute the idiosyncratic, individual mind" (39). If eventual personal motivations should not be overlooked, as no work of fiction is wholly self-contained or immune to exogenous influences (in the particular case of Mda and Couto, both have been actively engaged in their countries' politics, and both often share their views on political and social issues outside the field of fiction), it must not be ignored either that works of fiction are first and foremost the outcome of their authors' imaginary workings, even when based on historical events and pointing to recognizable features as in the case of both Mda and Couto's novels.

Contrasting with the many instances of violence based upon real events that are depicted in *Ways of Dying*, reliance on the imagination appears in the novel as a strategy for survival, as will be observed in the following chapter. For Atwell, Mda plays in the novel with modernism's typical attitude of non- or anti-instrumentalism by emphasizing Toloki's aesthetic performances (which might be interpreted as a metaphor for all artistic creations relying on creativity, including literature) as a sign of hope in the midst of a squalid environment:

> If I may put it so awkwardly, Mda re-instrumentalises modernism's anti-instrumentalism, bringing it into an effective relationship with a given context and history. This contextualisation precludes the delivering of messages, the flattening out of performance or its reduction to simple meaning, but what Mda dramatises is the power of non-instrumental art to awaken listeners to their precariousness, to stir up affective capacities, and to remind them that despite the brutalisation that is their daily lot, they are still agents of culture. (…) The

historical context of Toloki's performance is the wasteland of city and township in the narrow interregnum of South Africa between 1990 and 1994, that is, between the unbanning of the liberation movements and the first democratic election, when death has become a way of life, with Third Force killings engineered by security agents, the massacre of squatters by vigilantes, and the necklacing of child activists accused of being collaborators. To the African subjects who inhabit this space, Toloki offers not words of consolation but a symbolic presence whose function it is to symbolise. What Mda places before his readers is a performance that stands for the symbolic function, the point being to restore the image of the man-of-ritual, and the maker-of-culture (Atwell, 194-195).

Chapter 2

Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

Apartheid once constituted an insurmountable issue in South African literature, in the sense that most South African writers, regardless of their ethnic positioning, engaged in the production of literary works that were overtly politically and socially oriented. However, during the years of apartheid, the majority of South African writers who received international recognition - Alan Paton, André Brink, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, Breyten Breytenbach - were white. Before 1994, literary visions of South Africa by black writers were somewhat limited in number.[1] The white regime persecuted and censored black writers, banning their works and even forcing some of them into exile (the group of banned and/or exiled black writers includes, among others, Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, Alex La Guma and Mongane Wally Serote). With the end of apartheid, new perspectives for literary creation, as well as the opportunity for black writers to reach the forefront of South African literature, seemed to have finally arrived. Indeed, in the 1980s, Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs had already called on other writers to free contemporary literature from its political commitment and to make space for other themes. As early as 1984, with the groundbreaking essay "Rediscovery of the

[1] A number of reasons may have contributed to this situation, but among the most evident relate to the educational and linguistic politics regarding the black population under the apartheid regime, as Zoë Wicomb argues in the essay "Culture Beyond Color? A South African Dilemma": "Linguistic research has shown that there is no such thing as a literary language that certain people somehow have access to; there is only language which a writer will comfortably use and abuse to her own advantage. In our situation, (…) apartheid conditions have militated against the linguistic development of black people, both in the imposition of European languages and the neglect of education (…)" (179).

Ordinary", Njabulo Ndebele began arguing for a literature that would go beyond the putatively realistic portrayal of the violence of the apartheid regime:

> The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing (67).

In 1989, opponent of the regime Albie Sachs rejected the notion of culture as a weapon and stressed the importance of exploring ambiguity and contradiction through art in a paper entitled "Preparing ourselves for freedom", written for an ANC in-house seminar on culture:

> The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. Ambiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there was only bad in the past and only good in the future (239-240).

The pressure writers felt during apartheid to focus on the political situation of the country was replaced after the end of apartheid with the expectation (directed especially at black novelists) that the political and social contexts experienced in the new South Africa would allow the novel (especially the black novel) to break finally from its realistic character and to become open to more innovative and experimental themes and ways of writing. In the article "Endings and new beginning: South African fiction in transition", included in the book *Writing South Africa*, Elleke Boehmer expresses the expectation clearly:

> For a long time the novel has been used as a front for other kinds of communication – for political imperatives, for the telling of history, for informing the world about apartheid. Now that freedom has made new kinds of formal and cultural daring more possible, it will be liberating to see the lens of vigilant social observation crack across to give life skewed, fragmented, upended, not by apartheid as before, but as part of the manipulation of aesthetic form, of the testing of visionary, hallucinatory, dislocating, non-camera-ready ways of representing the world (53).

If, on the one hand, writers arguably gained a greater freedom of expression, on the other, after the end of apartheid, they lost their major subject of motivation. In fact, it is not uncommon for late-apartheid and early post-apartheid fiction to be described by some literary critics as stagnant and unchallenging in terms of style and subjects. According to André Viola, in the late 1980s and early 1990s some South African writers struggled with an apparent difficulty of dealing with the indeterminacy that characterised the country's situation. As a result of this impasse, very few writers dared envisage the future in their works, most of which continued to look to the past (95). For Boehmer, the hesitation towards the present and future of the country is manifested not only in the forms and subject matters of many narratives of that period, but especially in their suspended endings:

> What was happening was that the inescapable surrounding reality fenced in the potential questions raised by endings. Narrative uncertainty, its suggestiveness and tease, were constrained within the deathly binaries of a long history of oppression and opposition. Hoped-for but as-yet-inconceivable, the long-delayed moment of liberation, too, forced its own particular hiatus at the end of the South African narrative (45).

Among the new generation of post-apartheid writers, few black novelists have been critically acclaimed. This situation can be attributed to several factors, which range from former political and social constraints to entrenched literary traditions. During the days of apartheid the novel was a neglected genre among black writers and readers, for poetry and plays were more convenient and more economical forms of literary protest. Shorter and easier to memorise than novels or even short stories, poems and plays could be more easily concealed from censorship and performed in public. Short stories, less time-consuming (for both writers and readers) and more immediate than novels, also have a richer tradition among the black population. Because many black writers began their writing careers as journalists, writing short essays, (which, though mostly in non-fictional modes still have more in common with short stories than with novels) they also felt more comfortable writing short stories than writing novels. In addition, contexts such as the high illiteracy rates and the low income of the majority of South Africa's black population, make literature, and particularly novels, luxury goods. As Boehmer concludes in her analysis of the fiction produced during the period of transition from apartheid to democracy, the profound changes South Africa has been witnessing since the end of apartheid require time for the adjustments posed by the new political, social and cultural contexts:

> It takes not simply time but important transformations in a society – the widening of an educational system, for example, or the deepening of an indigenous intellectual tradition – for a regenerated national literature to develop (53).

Among contemporary South African black novelists, Zakes Mda is one of the most renowned, especially for his ability to articulate an aesthetic sensibility in which subtlety, ambiguity and humour are

central. Critically acclaimed, his novels have been awarded important literary prizes. *She Plays with the Darkness*, published in 1995, won the Sanlam Literary Award for that year. Published in the same year, *Ways of Dying* was awarded the Olive Schreiner Prize for Prose and the M-NET Book Prize in 1997. *The Heart of Redness*, published in 2000, received the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001 and the *Sunday Times* Fiction Award.

Mda has spent long periods of time outside South Africa, initially for political and later for academic reasons. In 1964 he joined his father, A.P. Mda, who was exiled in Lesotho. Later, in the 1980s he went to the United States to complete two Masters Degrees - in Theatre and Mass Communication. In the 1990s he taught at several American universities, and he presently lives in the United States, returning several times a year to his home country. For Anderson Tepper, being away from South Africa during the apartheid years may have actually contributed to the exploration of innovative approaches present in Mda's post-apartheid novels:

> Mda, the son of a founding member of the ANC, spent 32 years in exile, yet has returned to a South Africa that clearly inspires him with new dilemmas and tensions – no longer black and white, so to speak, but much more fluid and murky issues of identity and authenticity, progress and memory. And perhaps it is due to his long absence, too, that he has brought an outsider's fresh and edgy perspective to bear on his material, swinging loosely from grim social realism to moments of fantastical magic (Tepper).

Mda himself recognises that physical distance actually became an advantage in terms of literary creation:

> I owe a lot of my creativity to exile because exile gave me some distance from the situations I was writing about. Apartheid was a very absurd political system, very vicious, very cruel and also very funny and very strange.(...) You had your characters already cast there by the system, and not only the characters

> but also the events themselves, unfolding every day, affecting the lives of the people, all created for you by the system. The apartheid system itself was the author. (...) I had a disadvantage as far as that was concerned, because I could not take these ready-made stories as they unfolded there in the street. (...) I had to find new ways of writing about it. I had to find new literary devices. (...) It trained me to write in ways that were not literal, to move away from realism (Wark).

Mda began his literary career in the struggle years as a playwright, since in those days the performed urgency of drama seemed to represent the best opportunity to deal with pressing political and social issues in a direct manner. The early plays, written during the height of apartheid (and anti-apartheid struggle), followed the lines of protest literature, exposing the wickedness of the apartheid regime and inciting people to armed resistance. In the 1980s plays such as *The Hill* and *The Road* denounce the exploitation of black labour, the distortion of history and the manipulation of religious ideology by the white ruling class for its own political purposes.

From 1985 to 1992 he directed the Theatre-For-Development Project at the University of Lesotho. He also founded the Marotholi Travelling Theatre, whose objective was to work with local people from villages in remote mountain regions in the creation of plays focusing on issues of everyday concern. Theatre, which has a strong democratic potential for enabling audience participation, especially when compared to literary forms that exist principally via the medium of the printed page, provided Mda with a means to raise social and cultural awareness among marginalised populations through their direct involvement in creative productions. Aimed at the social development of the population through their contributions to the creative process, his theatre "not only spreads the message through storytelling, but becomes the message", as Litzi Lombardozzi outlines

in the article "Harmony of Voice: Women Characters in the Plays of Zakes Mda" (217).

As a playwright, Mda occupies a unique position in contemporary South African theatre, revealed not only by the extensive list of his plays that have been published and performed (around thirty), but also by the critical and popular recognition they have received. In the words of Lombardozzi, Mda is "one of the most powerful South African writers of critical theatre in the past thirty years" (213). Besides two collections of plays – *The Plays of Zakes Mda* (1990) and *And the Girls in Their Sunday Dresses: Four Works* (1993), Mda has also published a treatise on the uses of theatre for social development entitled *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre* (1993). In 1978 his play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (performed in 1978 and published in 1980) won the Amstel Merit Award. The following year, he was awarded the Amstel Playwright of the Year for *The Hill* (performed in 1980 and published in 1990). In 1995, five of his plays were produced by important mainstream theatres in South Africa within a period of six months.

While his early plays focused almost exclusively on political issues related to apartheid, his later plays have enlisted a feminist approach, following the changing attitudes towards women's issues in the 1980s, which, thanks to women's liberation movements, began to gain some visibility. According to Lombardozzi, while he revealed strong political concerns about apartheid in his plays, it is nevertheless the way Mda depicts women that sets him apart from other playwrights of his time. Women are not simply portrayed as secondary members of binary relationships (i.e., someone's wife or someone's sister), but in some plays they are central characters. Unlike other male playwrights who portrayed most female characters as unidimensional and defined in terms of their male counterparts,

the women in Mda's plays are complex characters with a certain voice and agency.

Although in his plays he was already telling stories that centered upon intimate or family relations as the basis for political and social critique, and not focusing exclusively on direct protest against the political situation of the country, it was only after the end of apartheid that he began writing novels, because as he says: "the demise of apartheid freed the imagination of the artist and also afforded us the luxury of focusing on one piece of work, over a long period of time, without that need for immediacy" (Wark). Time has thus played an important role in making post-apartheid literature more reflective: while apartheid was unsurprisingly a crucial factor in the process of literary creation in South Africa, with distance from the previous political context, spaces for new strategies to be explored have, as predicted, become apparent.

In the article, "On Laughter, the Grotesque, and the South African Transition: Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*", Rita Barnard describes his first novel, *Ways of Dying*, not simply as "post-apartheid", but as

> "post-anti-apartheid" not only with respect to its thematic preoccupations, but with respect to its form: a multilayered, fantastic plot, which decisively breaches the generic constraints that the culture of resistance, with its demand for realist immediacy, had for years placed on the black writer (280).

Mda's novel can be said thus to respond to some of the appeals made by Albie Sachs and Njabulo Ndebele. Neither apolitical nor overtly political, *Ways of Dying* focuses on the lives of two ordinary people who learn from each other how to survive in a time of omnipresent death and suffering: Toloki, who reinvents himself as a Professional Mourner, and Noria, a homegirl whom death reunites him with after many years of separation (they meet on a Christmas Day at the funeral of Noria's son, where he is performing his services as

Professional Mourner). As André Viola concludes in the article ”Translating Oneself Into the New South Africa Fiction of the 1990s”, in which he analyses some of the literary works produced during the period of transition (corresponding to the years immediately before and after the 1994 general elections), a considerable number of novels by black writers published in those years deal with the category of the ordinary as influentially defined by Ndebele, in their portrayal of common people facing up to quotidian problems:

> Thus, among the characters, there are fewer exceptional beings exclusively committed to the fight against the regime, and more people entangled in the problems of everyday life, bearing the brunt of apartheid in an oblique fashion (…) In that respect, these unexceptional people can be said to represent the majority of the population who resisted oppression through an obscure fight for survival (100).

In its portrayal of Toloki and Noria’s everyday attempts to overcome death and despair physically and emotionally, the novel appears to follow Ndebele’s appeals for writers to focus on the daily struggles that constitute the greatest challenge in the lives of ordinary people: ”even under the most oppressive of conditions, people are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order (Ndebele, ”Rediscovery”, 55). The events in *Ways of Dying* are presented mostly through the point of view of Toloki, as Rogier Courau and Sally-Ann Murray point out in ”Of Funeral Rites and Community Memory: Ways of Living in *Ways of Dying*”:

> In *Ways of Dying*, reality is focalised from an omniscient point of view that presents us with Toloki walking, moving through the city. Yet, the very details that accumulate around Toloki enable us to feel a more multiple nomadic wandering through the streets of the city, as if encountering people, places and events through the subjective perspective of Toloki (99).

Examining literary representations of the destitute in several African novels in the article "Beggars' Description: 'Xala,' the Prophetic Voice and the Post-independent African State", Sam Raditlahlo explains that by choosing Toloki, a solitary character whose dormant artistic personality comes alive through his relationship with Noria, and who lives at the margins of society, Mda gives the readers a very particular perspective of the tragic events that took place during the transition period, and also seems to be stressing the relevance of everyday actions and the common people for post-apartheid South Africa:

> What Mda achieves with his portrayal of Toloki is two-fold: to re-visit a horrible and terrifying period of South Africa's recent history, but more importantly, to restore the so-called "surplus people" a measure of pride denied them by the state (179).

In *Ways of Dying*, the worlds of economic and official power, represented in the novel, among other characters and references, by the greedy Nefolovhodwe, and through the hypocritical and insensitive attitudes revealed by the political leaders of the resistance movement, are subject to satire and criticism. Like Toloki, Nefolovhodwe goes to the city to look for a better life, and also earns his living out of death (as a coffin maker). However, unlike Toloki, whose role as a Professional Mourner seems more attuned to the spiritual side of death (apparently more appreciated at the funerals of the poor rather than at the funerals of the rich, where his services are not welcome), Nefolovhodwe accesses the world of the rich by exploiting the materialistic aspect of death (he begins by producing cheap coffins for the poor but ends up trading ostentatious funerary goods for the very rich).[2] Unlike Toloki and Noria, who in spite of

[2] Besides a strong performative character, enacted in the various funeral ceremonies depicted in the novel, a faithfulness to history and authenticity is also evident in *Ways of Dying*. For instance, the deaths portrayed in the novel had been

living in the city for so many years, keep some traditions from their rural origins, such as that of sleeping in a foetal position,[3] Nefolovhodwe is ashamed of, and even tries to deny his rural origins in the village. Although the leaders of the resistance movement are not given much space in the novel, their actions are closely scrutinized. The behaviour they display at the meeting that takes place in the settlement is prone to ambivalent interpretations: while coming to the settlement may be understood as a positive desire for proximity, the fact that they arrive in big, expensive cars could also reveal distance and even some indifference towards the problems of the underprivileged class they are supposed to represent. But it is their refusal to publicly apologise for and condemn the atrocious necklacing of Noria's five-year-old child by the Young Tigers as a

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reported in South African newspapers at the time Mda was writing the novel. Moreover, the pervasiveness of death and its effects, which mark Mda's novel, have been a recurring feature of the contemporary social context of South Africa. In "Dead but Not Quite Buried", Charles van Onselen looks closely at the situation of death and burial activities in South Africa in the late 1990s, and concludes they provide manifold business opportunities across class or colour lines: "In an industry increasingly driven by supply-side considerations there is no shortage of undertakers of any class or colour (23)". Nonetheless, observing the situation of cemeteries in the area of Greater Johannesburg, van Onselen notes that despite the recent conquest of democracy in the country, they are still subject to great levels of stratification induced by factors such as geographical areas or facilities provided, and perhaps most importantly, by the economic status of the deceased: "Indeed, cemeteries are strictly graded on a four-point scale, ranging from the 'A' accorded to the Braamfontein, Brixton and West Park Cemeteries, which meet the needs of the predominantly affluent white northern suburbs of the city, to 'D' – the status for cemeteries that service African townships such as Alexandra and Soweto, to the north and south of the city. (…) There are some, but not many restrictions placed on where the bereaved may bury their dead, although not everything has changed since the days of the old South Africa" (23).

[3] In the chapter "Zakes Mda: *Ways of Dying*", included in the book *Making Use of History in New South African Fiction*, Sten Moslund argues that the maintenance of this traditional way of sleeping, associated with birth, is a symbol of hope renewed each day: "Not only do they reassure the community a sense of togetherness and belonging, they produce a promise of life and regeneration, signaled in the connotations of the unborn child and rebirth every morning that may be affirmed even in the midst of death and destruction" (99).

punishment for treason, thus validating the use of arbitrary violence, that earns Mda's sharp criticism:[4]

> The kind of silence that everyone is demanding from her is that she should not condemn the perpetrators in any public forum, as this would give ammunition to the enemy. Now she sees that what they really want is that she, like the rest of the community, should accept her child's guilt, and take it that he received what he deserved. If she keeps quiet, the whole scandal will quietly die, and no one will point fingers and say, "You see, they say they are fighting for freedom, yet they are no different from the tribal chief and his followers. They commit atrocities as well" (178).

Much literature of the struggle in South Africa was based on the dichotomy "black virtue versus white evil", deliberately exaggerating certain aspects and omitting questionable actions, thereby maintaining group opposition to oppression. Through Noria's exposition of the leaders' silencing policy, Mda counters this simplification of the differences between opposing groups by creating important spaces in the novel for pluralism and ambiguity.[5] Already

[4] The infamous practice of necklacing was a method of publicly judging and punishing the members of the black community who allegedly collaborated with the apartheid regime during township disturbances in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Even though the African National Congress (ANC) officially condemned the practice, it was frequently carried out in the name of the political organization. Wicomb explains how the practice entails a physical and political positioning: "It is about positioning: placing the victim as other within an isolating circle of fire and outside of the community; replacing the decorative necklace with the destructive tire, a symbolic reminder to victims of where they have placed themselves as they embraced the enemy with its lure of lucre; and positioning the necklacers above such treachery" ("Culture", 181).

[5] Even though many violent acts perpetrated by members and supporters of the ANC (some of which were instigated by leaders of the political organization) have been silenced and gone unpunished, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, independent inquiries were launched into human rights abuses committed by its own members. Wole Soyinka stresses the relevance of that political decision for the process of peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa in *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*: "A fact that is often conveniently ignored is that the territory of culpability in the South African instance was not limited to the state. One of the most courageous admissions that I know of in the aftermath of revolutionary struggles was that of President Nelson Mandela, who openly confronted the ANC with its own dismal record of needless cruelty and abuse of human rights (…)" (27). According to Martha Minow, this internal process of

looking at the post-apartheid years, Mda stresses the importance of avoiding the perpetuation of simplistic dichotomies, which may result in an inversion of group oppression or in the exploitation of new group divisions, serving to legitimise power and special privilege. Additionally, the depiction of Nefolovhodwe's tradition-denying greed (in order to be accepted in the world of the rich and beautiful, he has to forget his rural past and the traditions associated with it) and the aloofness and insincerity exhibited by politicians, could indicate a cautionary function in the novel, pointing towards the danger of perpetuating the inequalities of the past unless everyone is allowed access to social and cultural self-determination. *Ways of Dying* reveals Mda's anxiety about South Africa's social and political situation, exhibited earlier in the plays he wrote during the apartheid years, and which were overtly highly political. The change of political regime in South Africa led, as already noted, to an adaptation to the new circumstances in Mda's literary works; in this light Bell and Jacobs summarize Mda's development:

> With the ending of apartheid, Mda experienced a sense of liberation. No longer under pressure to produce theatre to mobilise against an oppressive regime, he found the time to work on long pieces of prose and moved from being a political playwright to a critical novelist (4).

The freedom brought by the post-apartheid period has not implied a decrease in Mda's concern for social and political issues, but it has

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confrontation with past wrongdoings would inspire the model subsequently adopted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Some ANC leaders thought a similar but more extensive truth commission to inquire into the massive atrocities committed by apartheid officials would help to honor victims and also offer some answers to burning questions about what really had happened under apartheid (53). It should also be noted that although the majority of the testimonies brought before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission related to black victims of apartheid forces, there was a minority of testimonies regarding abuses committed by people involved in the anti-apartheid movement as well.

widened the scope of voices and critical perspectives represented in his fiction. In *Ways of Dying* this widening can be observed in the portrayals of Nefolovhodwe and of the leaders of the resistance movement, which stress Mda's concern about the dangers of uncontrolled power and political leaders' betrayal of commitment to the people they should work for.

At the very beginning of the novel, there is a tragicomic scene involving a traffic jam provoked by wedding and funeral processions going in opposite directions, which explores an important symbolic opposition depicted throughout the novel between life and death, celebration and mourning, the poor/ugly and the rich/beautiful:

> The driver of the convertible car in front, which carries the bride and the bridegroom, argues with driver of the van which carries the mother of the dead child. (…)
> "We are a procession of beautiful people, and many posh cars and buses, while yours is an old skorokoro of a van, and hundreds of ragged souls on foot" (10-11).

The stalemate is only resolved when, at the sight of Toloki, the people in the wedding procession agree to give way to the funeral procession of Noria's son:

> No one will budge. (…) Toloki walks to the convertible. He greets the bridal couple, and is about to give them a stern lecture on funeral etiquette, when the ill-humoured driver of the convertible suddenly decides that he will give way after all. (…) He has that effect on people sometimes. Perhaps it is his fragrance. And the black costume and top hat of his profession. It cannot be that the driver of the convertible is intimidated by his size. He is quite short, in fact. But what he lacks in height he makes up for in breadth. *He is quite stockily built, and his shoulders are wide enough to comfortably bear all the woes of bereavement*. His yellow face is broad and almost flat, his pointed nose hovers over and dwarfs his small child-like mouth. *His eyes are small, and have a permanently sorrowful look that is most effective when he musters up his graveside manner*. Above his eyes rest thick eyebrows, like the hairy thithiboya caterpillar (11, my emphasis).

This outcome speaks of Mda's sympathies for the underprivileged, who try somehow to find non-violent ways of restoring some kind of normality to their lives, while it is critical of the arrogant attitude of the rich and beautiful. For Barnard, in this passage Mda allegorically inverts the stereotyped discourse of beauty and ugliness, which usually relegates the ugly to the margins. This need to separate the beautiful and rich from the ugly and poor permeates apartheid society, but is particularly evident in the apartheid city, with its wealthy white areas and its impoverished black peripheries. This inversion also seems to indicate the possibility of a reversal of roles in post-apartheid South Africa. The reaction of the people at the wedding procession to Toloki exhibits a combination of awkwardness and awe, resulting in part from his physical appearance. A blend of realistic portrayal and humour, the physical description of Toloki is itself ambivalent and also shows how some of his physical traits are adapted to his performances as a Professional Mourner (see my emphasis). Later on, in one of the novel's frequent temporal digressions, we realise that the constant commentaries associating his face with death constitute the main incentive for the adoption of his new profession:

> His sad eyes were quite famous, even back in the village. We used to sing about Toloki's sorrowful eyes. Slowly he reached the decision that he was going to mourn and that people would pay him for this service. Even the fat Nefolovhodwe had told him, "Your face is a constant reminder that we are all going to die one day." He was going to make his face pay. After all, it was the only gift that God had given him. He was going to benefit from the perpetual sadness that inhabited his eyes. The concept of a Professional Mourner was born (133).

Even from the perspective of physiognomy, Toloki is clearly linked with death and suffering. Finding a meaningful way to survive

through other people's deaths, nevertheless, he somehow engages with life and hope. As Margaret Mervis explains in "Fiction for Development: Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*":

> Through the development of a unique value system and the invention of a role for himself as a professional mourner, Toloki manages to earn a meagre living, to satisfy his creative needs, and to carve a niche for himself in the community (Mervis, 40).

Although Toloki's deliberate isolation and naiveté blur his perception of the dramatic events taking place in the period of transition, the devotion to his profession, which is a means of surviving both physically and mentally, reveals a strong determination to overcome the adversities of the underprivileged and a refusal to occupy the role of victim. Courau and Murray argue that by establishing himself as a Professional Mourner in order to be able to survive in an urban social context, but resorting to a combination between various cultural forms and expressions, including traditional African funeral rites, Toloki becomes a kind of performative mediator, not only between the realms of life and death, but between tradition and modernity:[6]

> He uses and adapts traditional performance techniques, at once affirming old traditions and reworking them to suit the needs of the new society emerging in South Africa at the time and he becomes the embodiment of the community's dynamic towards survival. In effect, he becomes a contemporary version of the ancient African trickster figure, in that he is able to channel the energies of complex and hybridised patterns of tradition *and* the

[6] For a description of Xhosa and Zulu funeral practices that may have inspired the various funeral rituals portrayed by Mda in *Ways of Dying*, see Steinmeyer, 164. The rituals and lifestyle adopted by Toloki as a Professional Mourner are also influenced by his fascination with oriental monks: "Sometimes he transports himself through the pages of a pamphlet that he got from a pink-robed devotee who disembarked from a boat from the east two summers ago, and walks the same ground that these holy men walk. He has a searing fascination with the lives of these oriental monks. It his the thirst of a man for a concoction that he has never tasted, that he has only heard wise men describe. He sees himself in the dazzling light of the aghori sadhu, held in the same awesome veneration that the devout Hindus show the votaries" (15).

> reality of a new-found Western form of urban living (93, italics in the original).

The costume he wears as Professional Mourner also contributes to the contradictory reactions to his figure. The outfit Toloki selects from a shop that rents costumes for special occasions emphasizes his oscillation between the realms of the ordinary and the magical- while meant to give some solemnity to the departing ceremonies of the many ordinary people who suffered cruel deaths, it is simultaneously clearly reminiscent of fantasy worlds:

> Most of his outfits were period costumes that actors and producers came to rent for plays that were about worlds that did not exist anymore. But other costumes did not belong to any world that ever existed. These were strange and fantastic costumes that people rented for fancy dress balls, or for New Year carnivals, or to make people laugh (26).

For Courau and Murray, Toloki's careful selection of the costume he will wear as a Professional Mourner signal his assertive will to define his identity:

> Toloki's interaction with and utilisation of the physical objects at his disposal within the urban landscape is an act of territorialisation, of defining himself in relation to new cultural spaces to which he is becoming accustomed in a context of socio-historical change (95).

In the article "Catastrophe and beauty: *Ways of Dying*, Zakes Mda's novel of the transition", Johan Van Wyk explains that in his role as a Professional Mourner, Toloki "evokes the image of an unreal being embodying the transition as an unreal historical time" (8), and he stresses that the costume is fundamental for the creation of that unreal atmosphere. Applying theoretical texts that deal with the power of laughter at times of crisis (including Mikhail Bahktin's

Rabelais and His World, in which the literary theory of the carnivalesque is dealt with[7]) in her analysis of *Ways of Dying*, Barnard argues that Toloki's costume, especially in its connection with imagined worlds, may be regarded as a clear element of the carnivalesque:

> This symbolic provenance suggests that the costume serves precisely the function Bakhtin attributes to the carnival mask: it is related to a transition from the fixed, existing world to the worlds of memory and imagination (287).

Toloki's costume somehow moves between contrasting worlds in its deliberate theatricality (highlighted by the top hat and black velvet cape): chosen to be worn at dramatic ceremonies, it nevertheless holds a connection to festive events. This metamorphic quality of the outfit, evoking and blending empirical and irreal worlds, signals one of the most significant characteristics of the novel, which is the combination of ambivalent notions. For Barnard, ambivalence is one of the defining traits of the carnivalesque:

> The quintessential aspect of the carnivalesque vision (and one that is emphasized again and again in the Rabelais book) is a peculiar and productive ambivalence. It is in this crucial respect

[7] The application of critical terms such as the carnivalesque to African writing is problematic. Because such literary terms are widely used, they are prone to generalisations. For instance, too often, the carnivalesque is used to describe almost any form of transgressive behaviour. When applied to African postcolonial texts, the use of European critical terms, such as the carnivalesque, becomes complicated further. Some writers and critics question whether the use of a European critical idea is the most suitable way to describe a literature that to some extent is marked by an attempt to break from European influences. However, literary theories can be refashioned in new contexts, as Mda shows in his novels (and as the different approaches by Barnard, Van Wyk and Samin to his use of the carnivalesque in *Ways of Dying* imply). Mda is indeed an example of how foreign influences can lead to the production of fresh and progressive insights: "Despite the fact that his literary consciousness has been shaped by tertiary education and teaching experiences at renowned international universities, he has remained close to his African roots, although these have coalesced with his Western experience" (Lombardozzi, 213).

> that *Ways of Dying* is wholly congruous with the Bakhtinian vision (284).

According to Barnard, this carnivalesque ambivalence opens the possibility of bringing apparently opposite notions such as life and death together, evidenced in the novel by several episodes that combine mourning and laughter. In these episodes, there are "elements of comedy that fuse with times of deadly seriousness" (Moslund, 92). Sitting outside their shack talking "about the world, and about death" (162), Toloki tells Noria of a particular occasion when the mourners attending four simultaneous funerals broke into laughter:

> The Nurse at the Zionist funeral had a booming voice. Soon, all ears at all four funerals were directed towards him, and people were no longer paying attention to their own funerals. He made a naughty joke about the deceased, and everyone at the various funerals at the cemetery burst out laughing. (...) Laughter kept coming in spurts, with some people even rolling on the ground. When the four processions finally marched off in various directions, some people were still laughing. Others had stomach cramps from laughing too much (163-164).

While the association of death with laughter might be regarded as universal (laughing at funerals or wakes is not particular to South Africa), Toloki uses a local proverb in order to contextualise it: "'In our language there is a proverb which says the greatest death is laughter'" (164). Many aspects of the novel, such as the characters' constant struggle to overcome the several difficulties they are faced with (poverty, violence, discrimination) by resorting to creativity and solidarity may have a universal resonance, but the attention given by Mda to the particular context of a South African society on the verge of decisive change, as well as to African cultural idioms (in terms of concrete references in the text, like the use of local proverbs, and through the adoption of literary techniques influenced by his African

roots, such as oral storytelling) requires readers to move constantly between the universal and the local.

The elaborate gloom of Toloki's outfit and its connection with the imported festival of Halloween (it had only been rented once for a Halloween party) is subject to different interpretations. While Barnard sees the outfit's bleak aspect as part of an intentional exaggeration more likely to provoke laughter than fear, for Van Wyk it is clearly reminiscent of the originary terror of Halloween. He argues that the images of macabre deaths that pervade the novel stress the connection between the period of transition and Halloween. He further argues that the senseless and widespread violence that marks the period of transition points to a society that has regressed. The description provided by Moslund of the situation lived during the years of transition in South Africa evokes an atmosphere of disintegration at various levels:

> Instead of a relief from violence with the beginning of negotiations between the warring factions, the country seemed on the brink of disintegrating into a hellish scenario of uncompromising racial and ethnic antagonism, arbitrary killings and pervasive lawlessness (91).

The temporary questioning and reversal of power, hierarchy and official culture by popular culture, regarded by Van Wyk as one of the characteristics of transitional literature, is reminiscent of the anarchic inversion associated with Bahktin and carnival. [8] Richard Samin, who also analyses the use of the carnivalesque in Mda's novel in "Wholeness or Fragmentation? The New Challenges of South African Literary Studies", links this inversion of state and masses with the

[8] Van Wyk uses the term transitional literature to designate a "literature produced in or about periods when societies experience extensive ideological, political, economic and institutional changes" (80). Written during and about the period of transition in South Africa, *Ways of Dying* can therefore be considered a novel of the transition.

author's choice of two marginal (and marginalised) characters – Toloki and Noria – to symbolise the hope of a better future for South Africa and to expose the greed of an emerging black middle class, represented in the novel by Nefolovhodwe, as well as the hypocrisy of the future black political leaders. The ambivalence inherent in the carnivalesque accordingly seems to suit Mda's description of a society going through a period of transition:

> Unlike the traditional carnivalesque, however, Mda's version obviously precludes the possibility of a return to a previous order. It rather serves to articulate in the novel an internal dialogics between the desire to integrate the totality of cultural differences within a new national framework and the diffidence towards an order which might be tempted to create a new divisions and exclusions for the sake of political unity. The uncertainties which the literary codes of magical realism and the carnivalesque create in the novel thus condition the reading of the social reality in which it is set (Samin, 86).

The end of the novel hints at both the necessity and the possibility of change, a perspective that, according to Samin, distances Mda's adaptation of the carnivalesque from that of the traditional carnivalesque, with its notion of a temporary overturning of established categories followed by a cyclical return to pre-existing hierarchies. Mda's novel stresses rather the hope and need of regeneration (especially for those oppressed by the apartheid system), but is cautious about the future of post-apartheid South Africa, which largely depends on the directions followed by the new political leaders.

The end of the novel, which meaningfully takes place on New Year's Eve, an occasion usually linked with renewal, articulates a spirit of joyous celebration that seems to function as a release from the previous violent atmosphere:

> At twelve midnight exactly, bells from all the churches in the city begin to ring. Hooters are blaring in all the streets. The settlement people burst into a cacophony: beating pots and pans and other utensils together, while shouting "Happe-e-e-e New Year!" The din is reminiscent of an off-tune steel band. At every street corner, tyres are burning (211).

The renewal of life and the joy associated with the summer holidays transmitted through the New Year celebrations contrasts further with the dramatic description of Noria's child's burial at the beginning of the novel.

The exuberant and loud New Year festivities, on the other hand, relate to the carnivalesque in their physical antics (which for the young even includes cross-dressing) and in their expression of the possibility of social and self-transformation. As Barnard explains:

> At the end of the novel, the traditional trappings of carnival are clearly in place, complete with drunken carousers in costumes and masks, and it is in the description of their revels that one of the most crucial elements of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is foregrounded. This is, in a word, freedom: freedom from the fear and intimidation that was pervasive in the unpredictable world of the South African transition (288).

Through the symbolic use of the burning tyres, which have lost their dramatic and violent connotation to become part of the celebrations, the novel's final lines express the much desired deliverance from the arbitrary violence that dominated the period of transition and that culminated in the novel in the inhumane necklacing of Noria's son:

> Tyres are still burning. Tyres can burn for a very long time. The smell of burning rubber fills the air. But this time it is not mingled with the sickly stench of roasting human flesh. Just pure wholesome rubber (212).

Ways of Dying may be said thus to depict the period of transition in South Africa as a time of great instability and irrational violence, in a

narrative register that balances carnivalesque fantasy with apocalyptic reality. As Moslund explains:

> Whereas the apocalyptic images suggest death-in-life, the relief is to be found in its antonymic coinage life-in-death, as a whole range of examples confirm the presence of a courageous spirit in the face of death (92).

While the apocalyptic imagery conveys a realistic picture of the ways of dying during the transition period, the carnivalesque antics challenge the established social order, pointing to the possibility of creating more socially and culturally constructive ways of living on a permanent basis. In a troubled time like this, the character of Toloki emphasizes the importance of recovering a space and time for mourning in the middle of death, violence and political protest. Just as post-apartheid South African society needed a space and time to come to terms with the changes occurring in the present, as well as to deal with the dramatic events of the past, post-apartheid literature requires a period of thematic and stylistic adaptation to the new circumstances.

In the article "Chanting the Song of Sorrow: Threnody in Homer and Zakes Mda", Elke Steinmeyer argues that the adaptation to this period of transition applies to Toloki as well as to Mda, as both protagonist and creator try to find a space for themselves in a community that has undergone significant changes (170). Through his reinvention as Professional Mourner, Toloki successfully finds not just employment but his way in the community during this period. Similarly, with the writing of *Ways of Dying* Mda redefines himself as an artist not only by adopting a literary genre that is new to him, but by resorting to literary devices outside realism, thereby establishing an important position for himself in the literature of the new South

Africa.[9] In its narrative depth and stylistic complexity, *Ways of Dying* is an attempt to find spaces for new modes of representation, beyond the supposed dichotomy between "white" postmodernist writing, regarded as apolitical, and "black" realist writing, perceived as socially engaged, polarised positions whose ambiguities and contradictions Mda's work teases apart. Jabulani Mkhize distinguishes between the two trends in apartheid literature in the article "Literary Prospects in 'Post-Apartheid' South Africa": while the works of white writers such as J.M. Coetzee, André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach explored modernist and post-modernist techniques, works by black writers like Njabulo Ndebele, Mongane Wally Serote and Es'kia Mphahlele did in fact follow a neo-realist mode. According to Mkhize, black writers rejected post-modernist techniques of writing because they perceived them as apolitical. Realist techniques of writing appeared best suited for the politically engaged literature they wanted to produce. Writing about some of the most significant literary influences in his writing, Mda indicates another practical explanation for the adoption of a realist mode of writing by most black writers:

> For many black South African writers, the only literary models were the nineteenth-century realists. Theirs was the only

[9] In Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome To Our Hillbrow*, there is a direct reference to *Ways of Dying* and its importance in the context of South African literature: "He bought Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* after Refilwe had recommended it very strongly, with the enthusiasm of a South African who thought that her country had not been left behind when it came to quality literary output" (107). Mda's novel is not just mentioned as a literary reference in South African fiction; the main characters in *Ways of Dying* are used by the narrator in Mpe's novel when considering the destiny of Refilwe, one of Mpe's characters: "Toloki was an ordinary person, with truly individual mourning skills, in the process of inventing an extraordinary profession. As she recommended it, Refilwe could not have known that her family would soon have cause to mourn on her own behalf. Theirs would not be professional mourning, but it would be sincere. Had she known, then, that she would have a new occasion for brooding in this Oxford of ours, she might have wondered whether she would have the strength of Noria, the Bone of Toloki's Heart, to deal with the tremendous burden of the notorious disease that was to make her the talk of our Tiragalong and Hillbrow and so many other places" (108).

> literature in English to which we were exposed by the educational system. Whereas in drama, for some reason, we did explore modernists like T.S. Eliot and George Bernard Shaw, and naturalists like Ibsen and Strindberg (in addition to the ubiquitous Elizabethan bard), in fiction the only writers that were extensively prescribed were George Eliot (particularly *Silas Marner*), Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters. That is why we wrote, as critic Lewis Nkosi once noted, as if the modernists and postmodernists never lived (Mda, "Justify", 2-3).

Mhkize also suggests that by narrating a story related to an authentic historical context resorting to a type of magical realism Mda's *Ways of Dying* inflects the possibility of an intersection between postmodernist and realist writing. Similarly, Samin includes Mda in the group of writers that he regards as being able to move beyond the postmodernist/realist dichotomy that characterised most of the literature produced during apartheid:

> writers like Zakes Mda, Marlene van Niekerk, Chris van Wyk and Ivan Vladislavic have mapped out new imaginary terrains, forged new languages and strategies to address the changes brought about by political developments and shaped new meanings. While seemingly rejecting both the strictures of critical realism and the a-historicism of postmodern literary self-reflexivity, they created imaginary loci more responsive to the rich and complex varieties of discourses which criss-crossed the cultural space immediately before and after the demise of apartheid (85).

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda resorts to contrasting literary styles to portray the poor: while their harsh daily lives (and deaths) are depicted in a very direct and apparently objective manner, their attempts at survival through creativity and spirituality are conveyed through the description of fantastic episodes, which require the readers' more active involvement and deciphering. This creative interweaving of the everyday life of ordinary people during the violent period of transition from apartheid to democracy with a will to survive

supported by African cultural traditions appears personnified in the character of Toloki:

> in creating a character such as Toloki, Mda is attempting to give imaginative and experiential weight to the discourses of township culture by filtering them through the traditional knowledges associated with African communal culture. Toloki, a figure of liminal positioning, seeks to mediate between a copious range of cultural forms and expressions, both marginal and mainstream, of modernity and rural past (Courau and Murray, 93-94).

When Toloki first decides to become a Professional Mourner, his main intention is to profit from the large number of deaths occurring in the city every day. However, as he develops his talent in the profession, he finds that mourning, more than just a means of surviving economically, has actually become his mission in life. When Toloki tries to explain his need to mourn to Noria, he compares it to a religious vocation: "'I am a monk, Noria. A man with a vocation. I mourn for the dead. I cannot stop mourning, Noria. Death becomes me, it is a part of me'" (115).

Though initially regarded with suspicion and strangeness by the people attending funerals, Toloki's performances as a mourner become more emotional and are gradually accepted (in some cases, only tolerated) by poor people as an important part of their ceremonies:

> Soon enough he learnt that it was only at poor people's funerals that he was welcome. Rich people did not want to see him at all, so he did not bother going to their funerals. When he approached poor folks, they would give him some coins, and tell him to come and mourn with them (134).

The mourning rites created by Toloki, which result from the combination between his material need to survive and his need to express his artistic sensibility, seem to be understood by some of the

people who attend them as a communal way of sharing their bereavement. The presence at funerals of a stranger whose role is to reveal respect for the deceased through a public demonstration of grief apparently enacts the notion of belonging to a community, beyond the circle of people one knows. Connecting the worlds of the living and the dead, Toloki's mourning rites may be seen as performances of community memory, as Courau and Murray argue:

> The funeral is represented by Mda as a powerful enactment of community memory through ritual and a social event that brings people together, both relatives and strangers, and in Toloki's intervention in public mourning, symbolises a community activity that provides opportunities for urban social cohesion and group dynamism. It is challenging, therefore, to discover ways in which community history or community memory is given life and substance in *Ways of Dying*. The rituals of death provide the source of cultural continuity and connection that is needed if memory and history are to survive and Mda reworks some of the traditional roles associated with funeral rites, implying that tradition and community are processes that are evolving in response to the complex demands of survival in the post-apartheid city (101).

In such a violent time when even "Funerals acquire a life of their own, and give birth to other funerals" (160), Toloki's emotional mourning restores some degree of solemnity to the ceremonies and respect for the dead, even when death has become so prevalent. In *Ways of Dying*, the exhaustive descriptions of senseless deaths, mostly through the character of the Nurse,[10] entail two apparently

[10] Elke Steinmeyer provides an explanation of the Nurse's role: "The Nurse is normally the person, man or woman, who last saw the dead person and tells the community how he or she met their death and reports their last words" (166). In their speeches, the various figures of the Nurse also function as a kind of historical consciousness of the community, not only through presenting realistic and detailed descriptions of ways of dying, but by providing commentaries (often quite harsh) on the country's social and political situation. This socially and politically committed figure of the Nurse represents a deep contrast with Toloki, who is apparently unaware of social and political matters until he meets Noria, and whose main intention is to use his artistic creativity in his performances as Professional Mourner, thereby recovering the more spiritual and humane side of death. In Mda's

contradictory aspects of the human condition: our simultaneous commonality and uniqueness. In the novel, funerals are a clear sign of that uniqueness, revealed through the creation of different sounds by Toloki, according to the number of people being buried, or the causes of death:

> At the cemetery Toloki sits on one of the five mounds, and groans, and wails, and produces other new sounds that he has recently invented especially for mass funerals with political overtones. These sounds are loosely based on chants that youths utter during political rallies. But Toloki has modified them, and added to them whines and moans that are meant to invoke sorrow and pain. He sways from side to side, particularly when the Nurse tells us the story of the death of these our brothers and sisters (180).

In the article "The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature", Sam Durrant looks at the ways in which post-apartheid writers offer spaces in their works for personal and communal expressions of grief. Analysing the role of Toloki as a Professional Mourner, Durrant argues that the ideas of individuality and community are connected and underlined by death, especially through the ritual of mourning:

> the kind of communion produced by death might bind us together not by the operation of ideology, not by an exclusionary appeal to sameness of race, nationality or class, but by an appeal to our own otherness, to our own difference from ourselves. One might say that we are bound together by our recognition of our own death in the death of others; their death performs, enacts or even mimes our own death. At a basic level, funerals perform a mimetic function: the body to be buried or burnt or left to rot mimes what will eventually happen to our own bodies (446).

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novel, the mourning rites created by Toloki, which become a means of collective sharing of grief, and the role of the Nurse, are both portrayed as funeral performances that function as a repositories of community memory.

Another characteristic associated in the narrative with Toloki's mourning, possibly influenced by Mda's previous experience as a playwright, is its sense of theatricality.[11] Besides the spectacularity expressed by Toloki's costume and grieving sounds, Margaret Mervis argues that because they involve a transaction between the performer and the audience at various levels (social, aesthetic, emotional and economic), Toloki's renditions at the funerals may be regarded as a sort of theatrical performance:

> Toloki's performance at funerals has a social function as well as an economic and aesthetic one. His role of professional mourner is a collective, social creation, based on improvisation (…) and involving audience participation in terms of the payments and approbation he receives from the mourners (…) (43).

The social, aesthetic and emotional functions of Toloki's performance are evident in the comment of an old woman who requests his service: "'I particularly invited you because I saw you at another funeral. You added an aura of sorrow and dignity that we last saw in the olden days when people knew how to mourn their dead'" (109).

Ways of Dying is frequently regarded by many literary critics as a turning point in post-apartheid literature, for moving away from the political and for focusing instead on the personal. However, the novel contains mixed signs (epitomized by its hybrid narrative style, impossible to define in only one term), which move between and beyond the simplistically political or personal, however they are defined. The novel constantly veers between realistic and fantastic portrayals of everyday life, between the bleak present and the hope

[11] The sense of theatricality associated with mourning rites is explored in the 2004 post-apartheid South African comedy *Max and Mona*. In his first film, Teddy Mattera (son of poet and author Don Mattera) directs the story of Max Bua, a young and talented village mourner who goes to the city of Johannesburg to study Medicine. After some misadventures in the city, he is forced to postpone his dream of becoming a doctor and has to resort to his gifts as a professional mourner in order to protect Mona, the village's sacred goat, as well as his shady uncle.

for a better future, straddling conventional notions of the political and the personal. In the article "How to live in postapartheid South Africa: Reading Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*", Irene Visser describes Mda's novel as being set apart from the rest of the post-apartheid literary production of the 1990s. She argues that the absence of concrete references to space and time in the novel allow it to move beyond the personal:

> This deliberate withholding of specific historic details, no longer necessitated by state censorship, may be interpreted as a new emphasis on the autonomy of art. For not only does the novel's focus on the experiential and the personal constitute a release from the former political demands of resistance literature, but in its eventual orientation towards the future of postapartheid South Africa, it also invites an engagement with wider issues than the historical, local or personal (39-40).

No longer feeling the pressure to devote their works to present historical events, a change took place in writers' temporal concerns: while under apartheid most writers revealed a great anxiety in their works about the present and future of South Africa, in the period of transition and in the early post-apartheid years, many novels dealt with the situation of the country before the end of apartheid, and very few dared to glimpse at the future. However, *Ways of Dying*, published in 1995 and whose setting, though imprecise, can be attributed sometime between 1989 and 1994, focuses on the present and near future of post-apartheid South Africa. According to Viola, Mda's novel stands out from the other novels of its time because its ending conveys the hope of a more positive future: "in the years before the 1990s, the possibility of a short-term change for the better was rarely considered by novelists, who tended to situate it in an unspecified future" (100).

Though looking at the final days of apartheid and even assaying a consideration of the near future, *Ways of Dying* includes many

intermittent and non-sequential flashbacks of important moments in the lives of the main characters, Toloki and Noria. Samin argues that in Mda's novel "the past is not simply re-created through the evocation of life under apartheid, the transition to democracy and the turmoil in the townships, it is also inscribed in the literary discourses which are fused in the text" (85). Part of those literary discourses originates from realistic writings of the 1960s, while other parts are rooted in traditional African lore of religious beliefs, tales and proverbs (related to traditional African orature and neglected as a source of wisdom during apartheid).

At the beginning of the novel, following the reunion between Toloki and Noria, after almost twenty years of separation, at the funeral of Noria's son where Toloki is performing his activity of Professional Mourner, the story is suddenly interrupted and the readers directly addressed by its communal narrative voice:

> It is not different, really, here in the city. Just like back in the village, we live our lives together as one. We know everything about everybody. We even know things that happen when we are not there; things that happen behind people's closed doors deep in the middle of the night. We are the all-seeing eye of the village gossip. When in our orature the storyteller begins the story, "They say it once happened… ", we are the "they". No individual owns the story. The community is the owner of the story, and it can tell it the way it deems it fit. We would not be needing to justify the communal voice that tells this story if you had not wondered how we became so omniscient in the affairs of Toloki and Noria (12).

This initial explanation regarding the novel's omniscient and communal narrative seems to have been primarily intended for the novel's Western readers who may not be so familiar with a traditional African mode of oral storytelling, as Mda admitted to the journal *Africultures:*

> Here, the story is told by a communal voice. Because, as I tried to explain some way yet - I had to explain that because many readers from the West would not understand – this *we* is the plural who tells the story. [italics in the original](…) But I wouldn't explain that if the reader belonged to those people, to the culture from which I come (Mongo-Mboussa).

Mda recognizes that even though his works may have been influenced by Western (European and American) writers he has read, they have arguably and above all been informed and inspired by the African tradition of oral storytelling:

> [A] writer who has possibly influenced me is Gabriel Garcia Marquez [sic], whose work draws very strongly from the oral tradition of African slaves. Mine also draws from that oral tradition. It draws from it very strongly. My work will always have that intertextuality (…) with "orature", as it is called, in other words, oral literature (Kachuba).

He acknowledges that his Xhosa legacy has been a great influence on his writings, especially due to the participatory mode of traditional storytelling, which transforms the listeners into storytellers themselves:

> There's the folklore of the Xhosa people, the stories for instance that our grandmother used to tell us or that we told among ourselves. In our culture you are not only a consumer of the stories that are produced by your grandmother. You are a producer of stories as well (Wark).

While the adoption of this communal narrative voice is thus clearly assumed as one of the strategies Mda uses to approach an important element of African aesthetics – orature- , the literary genre he chooses – the novel – is clearly a Western one. As Moslund points out, given that the narrative voice in Mda's novel articulates aspects of both African and Western literary traditions, it inevitably results in

an ambivalent narrative style that questions (and challenges) any type of categorization:

> the indigenous techniques of story-telling are foregrounded in the otherwise alien form of the written novel and the western literary concept of the "omniscient narrator" is amusingly concretized by constituting a participatory, physical presence in the story (100).

Besides the evident connection with orature, the adoption of this communal narrating voice is also congruous with the relevance the community is given in the novel. The employment of this homodiegetic, first-person plural narrating voice functions in the novel also as a means to "place the limited world view of the comic protagonist into perspective" (Mervis, 48).

Another aspect related to traditional African story-telling in Mda's novel is the introduction into the narrative of aspects that challenge Western assumptions of reality in which the magical or fantastic are suspect, but which are unquestioningly accepted by the novel's characters as an integral part of their reality. Mda explains how this magical quality of the stories he listened to has influenced his writing:

> I've always been fascinated by the magic in our traditional stories, and also by the facts. The supernatural, the strange and the unusual exist in the same context as what you would call objective reality. (…) The magic in the stories that we tell is taken for granted as if it is a natural thing that has happened, as if it, in fact, does not contradict reality. There is nothing fantastic about it. It is something that comes from that world and then the rest of the characters and, of course, the audience take it for granted. So that is the nature of the stories. And that is what I use in my literature. All the ethnic groups of South Africa have stories like that (Wark).

Because this peaceful coexistence between the rational and the irrational is a trait not only of African story-telling, but of African

realities as well, Mda is reluctant about the use of the term "magic realism" to refer to the narrative style he uses in some of his works:

> I've never said that my work is not magical realism. I've merely said that I do not categorize my work. (...) I draw from the same sources as the creators of magical realism hence the "magic". I say "magic" in quotes, you see, because the world from which my fiction draws hasn't got that line of demarcation between the supernatural on one hand and what you would call objective reality on the other hand. The two merge and live side by side. Those who live in that world can't separate the two. In fact that's how they live their lives. What in the Western world you consider magic is part of their realism (Kachuba).

Bringing together apparently contradictory elements in his narrative, Mda thus challenges readers to find new forms of reading, more adapted to the realities of South Africa, and to question the tendency to compartmentalise. As Samin explains:

> By juxtaposing urban and rural traditions, or written and oral discourses, without attempting to rationalize and fuse their contradictions, Mda creates a space of indeterminacy and ambivalence where the rational and the irrational co-exist but where neither one nor the other are prioritized. By resorting thus to a form of magical realism at a crucial historical moment, Mda problematizes the reader's relation to the present and pre-empts the temptation of a non-contradictory reconstruction of history (86).

In *Ways of Dying*, the ambiguous and ambivalent portrayal of South Africa resorting to a combination of realism and fantasy confirms a recognisable picture of reality but shakes the perception of that reality, forcing readers to negotiate the status of the realities in the narrative. According to Mervis, it is the use of a particular type of magic realism[12] that results in a complex narrative style, combining

[12] The recurrent adoption of versions of magical realism by postcolonial writers points to its acceptance as a liberating and transformative narrative mode, underlining its political possibilities. The most notable locations of magical realism

reality with fantasy and leading to reflection: "Magic realism allows for the integration of the mythical, the historical, the fantastic and the ordinary in a holistic representation of identifiable reality which is not the escapism of pure fantasy" (51). For Derek Barker, who examines the uses of magic realism in the works of Zakes Mda in "Escaping the Tyranny of Magic Realism? A Discussion of the Term in Relation to the Novels of Zakes Mda", the mode is resorted to in *Ways of Dying* as a means of dealing with "the struggle to come to terms with a present thoroughly contaminated by an impossible past, impossible because of the incomprehensible inhumanity which informs the transition period from apartheid to post-apartheid" (13). Integrating apparently irreconcilable elements such as objective and subjective portrayals of historical and social reality, and adapting aspects of African oral tradition to a Western genre, Mda's novel may

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in literature written in English correspond both to former colonized or settler nations, such as Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, West Africa, South Africa, India and the Caribbean. Even though analysing the magical realist productions in such varying contexts through a generic scope poses the risk of neglecting local particularities, there are nevertheless shared characteristics that require attention. Some postcolonial writers produce their works outside the dominant structures and culture centres (although most of their reading public is to be found in those centres and not at the margins) and therefore require a type of narrative that allows them to fill in representational gaps by giving voice to hitherto forgotten or overlooked points of view, as well as to recover traditional creative and spiritual aspects. While it is possible to portray postcolonial issues by resorting to other types of narrative, the hybrid nature of magical realism (the term was first used in art history to describe a European painting movement; it then moved to South American literature and spread to every continent; in the process becoming subject to diverse definitions) suits the mixture of genres, perspectives and cultures in postcolonial writing.

As regards South African literature in particular, magical realism appears suited to post-apartheid writing, which has moved beyond the need to denounce the evident injustice of the racist regime to the analysis of other complex social, cultural and interracial tensions. In a multicultural context such as that of South Africa, magical realism allows the creation of spaces where dialogue can be established, for its blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary allows space for ambiguity and pluralism and can help dismantle former simplistic dichotomies. We must not forget, however, that the use of magical realism may not always have to do with a deliberate option to use a narrative form adapted to postcolonial themes, but simply derive from existing storytelling traditions, as the literary imagination of the country (for instance, in the African tradition of oral storytelling) already inhabits a vision of the world where the so-called real and the irreal coexist.

indeed create room for ambiguity, while confronting the complex circumstances of post-apartheid South Africa and indicating the possibility of change, but delineating the nature of that change remains highly problematic.

Although the novel demonstrates that a communal way of life is still to be found in the city, the origins of collective oral storytelling are traced back to the village, generally a moral reference point in African literature, whether valorized or questioned. At the beginning of *Ways of Dying* Toloki and Noria are living in an unspecified city, but references to the past in their conversations, and especially the episodic flashbacks that recall their childhood and youth, help us realise that the two characters came originally from the same indeterminate village. These interruptions in the linear time progression of the narrative, which include bittersweet descriptions of village life, are essential to the successful transposition of oral storytelling into written form in Mda's novel, as they resonate with the cyclical nature of oral narrative. For Barnard, "it is largely because of these earlier rural scenes that *Ways of Dying* so successfully conveys a sense of folkways and oral traditions freshly breaking into literary form" (287).

Mda's depictions of village life in the novel, moreover, combine realistic and fantastic elements with humor, as the first narrative flashback depicting the village reveals:

> Noria. The village. His memories have faded from the deep yellow-ochre of the landscape, with black beetles rolling black dung down the slopes, and colourful birds swooping down to feed on the hapless insects, to a dull canvas of distant and misty grey. Now, however, it is all coming back. Pale herdboys, with mucus hanging from the nostrils, looking after cattle whose ribs you could count, on barren hills with patches of sparse grass and shrubs (28).

This uncompromising portrayal of the village contradicts a trait frequently found in apartheid and post-apartheid novels, that of the opposition between the "evil city" and the "Eden-like" countryside. In the article "Race, Culture, Narrative Voice, and the City in South African Literature", Kevin Lucia analyses the pervasiveness of the "Jim Comes to Joburg" theme in South African literature (the label derived from a 1949 film of the same name, it portrays the stories of poor, inexperienced villagers who travel to the city, symbolised by Johannesburg, looking for fortune). Though challenging the portrayal of the city as the site of all evil and of the village as a rural paradise, Lucia considers Mda's novel as being an example of this genre, as its two main characters leave their village and go to the city in search of a new life. Toloki runs away from the village after his father brutally assaults him, and vowing not to return while his father lives, he decides to go to the city "to search for love and fortune" (60). However, throughout his "odyssey to a world of freedom and riches" (60), he is faced with all sorts of obstacles, from racial discrimination to financial deprivation, but above all he feels overwhelmed by the ever-present and ever-growing atmosphere of violence that permeates the nation. Noria also moves to the city after the tragic death of her first son, hoping to relieve her pain. Like Toloki, she too has great expectations about what she will encounter there:

> Before she arrived in the city, she thought that she was going to lead a cosy life. People in the village, and in the small town where she lived in a brickmaking yard, had painted a glowing picture of life in the city. She believed that it would be possible to immerse herself in the city's glamour and allurement (…) the streets of the city were paved with gold and diamonds, after all (135).

It does not take her too long, however, to realise that life in the city, at least for the black people living in the settlements, is totally different from what she had imagined:

> She had a rude awakening when she arrived. There were no diamonds in the streets, nor was there gold. Only mud and open sewers. It was not like anything she had seen in her life, nor anything she had imagined (135-136).

Despite their disillusion with city life, Toloki and Noria are able to find and spread beauty and happiness amidst the squalid environment they are forced to live in. While Toloki teaches Noria how to live by resorting to creativity, Noria shows Toloki that it is possible to lead a meaningful life in the community by relying on mutual support:

> Noria returns at midday. She is carrying scraps of pap in a brown paper bag. She shares the food with Toloki, and tells him this is how she has been surviving for the past few years. She helps people in the settlement with their chores. (...) They give her food in return. (...)
> She has received fulfilment from helping others. And not for one single day has she slept on an empty stomach (134-135).

This strong expression of togetherness found in the settlement relates to the African humanist philosophy of *ubuntu*, a distinctive aspect of African culture Mda recalls from his childhood and that he transfers to his novels:

> When we black children of South Africa were growing up, we were taught by our parents, but especially by our grandparents, that we were not fully human until someone made us human. Humanity, our elders believed, was not something you were born with. Rather, it was endowed by other people. You were therefore a person because of other people. They called this philosophy *ubuntu* in the Nguni languages and *botho* in the Sotho languages. And how do others endow you with humanity? By giving you bounties of compassion and generosity (Mda, "Justify", 4, italics in the original).

In their common search for new ways of living, Toloki and Noria reconnect themselves with this humanist value system that has its origins in the African tradition they grew up with. Through the reconnection of the novels' main characters with African tradition via solidarity and creativity, Mda reveals his preoccupation with the social and cultural empowerment of the underprivileged, establishing continuity between his agitprop theatre and his later fiction.

As we have seen, Mda avoids a simplistic distinction in the novel between city life and village life. The city is portrayed as a site of great violence, but as a site of great solidarity as well. On the other hand, while the village is not portrayed as a lost paradise, some of the novel's passages in the rural setting convey a good-humoured atmosphere that contrasts starkly with the novel's many descriptions of the senseless violence of the late apartheid and early post-apartheid years.

It is in the first passage depicting village life that we are introduced to the earliest creative partnership in the novel, that between Noria and the blacksmith Jwara,Toloki's father:

> Jwara, for that was his father's name, earned his bread by shoeing horses. But on some days – Toloki could not remember whether these were specially appointed days, or whether they were days when business was slack – he created figurines of iron and brass. On those days he got that stuck-up bitch, Noria, to sing while he shaped the red-hot iron and brass into images of strange people and animals that he had seen in his dreams. Noria was ten years old, but considered herself very special, for she sang for the spirits that gave Jwara the power to create the figurines. She had been doing it for quite a few years. Although her voice added to the monotony of the bellows and beating metal, we thought it was quite mellifluous. We came and gathered around the workshop, and solemnly listened to her never-changing song. Even the birds forgot about the beetles, and joined the bees hovering over the workshop, making buzzing and chirping sounds in harmony with Noria's song (29).

Like the African tradition of storytelling, as a collective artistic activity, the figurines created by Jwara are not the product of an individual artist, but the result of a creative partnership. Just as in storytelling, where the artistic creation exerts a sense of wonderment on those who experience it, possibly resulting in the production of other stories, in the creative partnership described above, Jwara is inspired by Noria's singing to produce his iron figurines, which, in their turn, also have the potential in them to influence the creation of other works of art through the fascination they exert.

That sense of wonderment contained in the figurines will only be released at the end of the novel, when Nefolovhodwe, who had denied his African roots, is haunted by Jwara's spirit. Groundless superstition or reverence for the traditional custom of respecting the wishes of the dead impel Nefolovhodwe to excavate them from his old friend's workshop and to take them to Toloki. Agreeing to keep his father's figurines constitutes a decisive moment in Toloki's life, because while implying a painful recollection of the hurt and humiliation provoked by Jwara's incapacity to deal with his son's artistic personality, it simultaneously offers Toloki the opportunity to exorcise those past sufferings and to fully recover and express his creativity: "The figurines are a metaphor for the reconciliation between father and son, and for the inclusion of what is usable from the past in the creative reconstruction of the present and the building of the future" (Mervis, 45).

The figurines gain a new meaning, of pleasure and beauty, which replace the old feelings of hurt and deprivation. In that sense, they might also be interpreted as a metaphor for the post-apartheid years, as this historical period also requires a reconciliation with the country's past, no matter how terrible it was, as well as a recovery of the value of aspects related to indigenous African cultures, which had been

neglected. For Van Wyk, the figurines represent a strong cultural potential inherited from the past: "a repressed past also returns in a more positive way with a return to creativity: a creativity rooted in a traditional and rural past" (Van Wyk, 82).

When Toloki and Noria reunite, after a long period marked by loss and extreme suffering for both, their lives seem to have reached a standstill, with very low expectations. However, as they combine their artistic personalities, they establish a creative partnership that helps them to overcome the harsh conditions of their present lives, transforming ugliness into beauty and despair into hope.

The first visible product resulting from their partnership is Noria's new shack, admired by those who see it as if it were a work of art:

> When the neighbours wake up that morning, they all come to witness the wonder that grew in the night. They marvel at the workmanship, and at how the plastic and canvas of different colours have been woven together to form patterns that seem to say something to the viewer. No one can really say what their message is, except to observe that it is a very profound one (68).

A piece of rare beauty in the midst of the settlement's ghastly scenery, Noria's rebuilt shack is yet another symbol of the transformative powers of creativity and solidarity. While helping rebuild her shack, Toloki introduces Noria to his imaginary games, which have the potential to create beauty and happiness:

> Toloki mixes flour and sugar that he has bought from Shadrack's spaza shop, with water. He makes a paste to use for plastering the pictures from the magazines and catalogues onto the walls. The four walls are divided into different sections. On some sections, he plasters pictures of ideal kitchens. There are also pictures of lounges, of dining rooms, and of bedrooms. Then on two walls, he plasters pictures of ideal gardens and houses and swimming pools, all from the *Home and Garden* magazines. By the time he has finished, every inch of the walls is covered with bright pictures – a wallpaper of sheer luxury.

> Then Toloki takes Noria's hand, and strolls with her through the grandeur. First they go to the bedroom, and she runs and throws herself on the comfortable king-size bed (111-112). [13]

For Courau and Murray this is as an emblematic episode not only in the restricted sense of Mda's novel, but in the wider setting of post-apartheid literature, given that it reveals Toloki's ability to survive in the midst of changing, yet still adverse conditions, by interacting creatively with objects he removes from their ordinary contexts:

> The *Home and Garden* episode in *Ways of Dying* with its innovative use of the imagination in mediating the constraints of an oppressive, alienating social reality, a moment of survival, has gained iconic status in South African literature. The suggestion is that Toloki recontextualises cultural practices from their habitual, ephemeral, even banal origins, allowing them to give substance and comfort to his life, to claim the basic human needs for love and homeliness. Through the activity of roving and searching, he finds a sense of resolution and even personal resolve and is able to actualise a personal condition in what is otherwise an alienating socio-political context (98-99). [14]

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[13] In *Art and the End of Apartheid*, John Peffer highlights the post-apartheid photographic work of Zwelethu Mthethwa, particularly his portraits of the residents of the Cape Flats townships. One of those photographs, reproduced in Peffer's book, bears a striking resemblance to Mda's portrayal of Noria's shack (see Figure 1). While the posters on the wall, which point to elements of global middle class lives, might seem inaccessible to the woman portrayed, thus signalling the dialectic of social relations in post-apartheid South Africa, they may be regarded as a symbol of creativity and hope that makes these spaces also "the product of a self-made aesthetic, and they give evidence of a kind of lived-in-ness. These are homes, made beautiful, however humbly" (265).

[14] Glimpses of creativity (and survival) amidst squalid conditions, such as these portrayed by Mda have also been captured by a number of contemporary African visual artists, such as Angolan António Ole, whose best known piece, *Township Wall*, was "suscitada pela 'arquitectura dos musseques', os bairros de lata angolanos. Desde sempre fascinado pelas estruturas arquitectónicas, o artista embrenhou-se nesses territórios, na fronteira entre o asfalto e a terra batida, e durante anos, fotografou as casas e as pessoas, até que esses elementos fixados se transformaram numa motivação artística, em meados dos anos 90. Em causa, uma 'estética da pobreza', determinada pela utilização de materiais pobres, mas também pelos 'agentes envolvidos': 'As pessoas fazem as suas casas, ou melhor habitáculos, sem condições, mas com muita criatividade. Só que é um potencial que não é desenvolvido, porque não lhes são dadas chances. Há um grande desequilíbrio social, em Angola, o que me preocupa muito' (Nunes, 12). Ole's work, which granted him international recognition, is not a mere aesthetic re-creation of

Fig. 1 – Zwelethu Mthethwa, untitled color photograph, 1996-97.

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the township's architecture and lifestyle, but an important statement about the inequalities found in contemporary Angolan society. For his works, Ole resorts to the same type of materials the township dwellers use in their constructions in order to better interpret the present historical situation of the country: "Ole tem, por outro lado, o hábito de recolher destroços, objectos encontrados, por vezes no lixo, que depois incorpora nos seus trabalhos. (…) 'Com as ferramentas que tenho de feição, tento fazer um trabalho que crie uma empatia com as pessoas, de modo a que possam entender o que digo, principalmente sobre a História presente, e tirar daí lições para construir um futuro mais positivo'"(12). Another example is the sequence in *The Wooden Camera* (Ntshaveni Wa Luruli, 2003) in which the protagonist Madiba films bags blowing around in the township where he lives, abstracting movement, shapes and colours from the conditions of daily life.

As she lets herself become involved in Toloki's creative sense of life, Noria realises they should get together to discover new ways of living:

> "We must be together because we can teach each other how to live. I like you because you know how to live. I can teach you other ways of living. Today you taught me how to walk in the garden. I want to walk in that garden with you every day" (115).

Partners in life as well as in artistic creation, Noria, the political and social activist, and Toloki, the Professional Mourner, teach and learn from each other how to challenge and transform their ways of dying into ways of living, as Toloki implies when he says: "Death lives with us everyday. Indeed our ways of dying are our ways of living. Or should I say our ways of living are our ways of dying?" (98). They establish an unconventional mutually supportive relationship that has moved beyond the need for sexual expression. Toloki and Noria form an incongruous couple, not only because their relationship envisages the possibility of unprecedented gender equality, but also on account of their contrasting figures:

> Again they find themselves holding hands as they walk towards their shack. But now they are not embarrassed, and they do not pull away. They make a strikingly lovely picture against the sunset: she of the poppy-seed beauty, and he of the complexion that is yellow like the ochre of the village. She of the willowy stature in a red and white polka-dot dress, he of the squat and stocky body in khaki pants and shirt. Their grotesquely tall shadows accentuate the disparity in their heights. They trudge the ground with their cracked feet in the same tired rhythm (176-177).

As in his plays, in *Ways of Dying* Mda gives voice to female characters who suffer the triple exploitation of being black, female and underprivileged in an apartheid society. Among the female characters

in the novel, Noria is the one given more space and depth to express a flowing gendered identity. Faced with economic hardship, gender discrimination and the terrible deaths of her two children, Noria has had to adapt to various roles throughout her life in order to survive:

> The multiple roles inhabited by Noria embody an identity and subjectivity created at the place where Patriarchal discourse, material conditions, and her agency intersect. In portraying Noria, Mda has combined the real and imagined in an interesting and contradictory manner. Noria is the combination of the mother, virgin, prostitute, artist and activist (Mazibuko, 6).

To portray the female characters in the novel, Mda resorts to a variety of symbols related to societal constructions of womanhood, including those from within African literature, which include the mother, the healer, the witch, as well as the artist/muse, the virgin and the prostitute. However, Mda uses these symbols in an ambivalent manner, and the same female character may display contradictory characteristics, as in the case of Noria.

The novel's secondary female characters, such as That Mountain Woman (Noria's mother), and Toloki's mother, though not even accorded their birth names, for the village they live in renames them as they are perceived (Noria's mother is identified with her remote origins and Jwara's wife is only recognised in her motherly role) do not fit completely into the notion of ideal womanhood propagated by the patriarchal system. For instance, neither hesitates to criticise publicly their husbands' attitudes when it comes to their children's upbringing. Ironically, through her traditional role as a healer, Noria's mother finds a means to support herself, which was not common among rural women at the time, and also to gain the respect of the community. From her mother Noria inherits the independent spirit and the motivation to explore her abilities to bring about joy and to inspire artistic creativity. In their roles as healers and muses, both

Noria's mother and Noria enact a power rooted in African traditions that nevertheless reserve certain authority roles for women despite valorizing male power more highly.

Attentive to the daily events of the settlement, Toloki becomes aware of the pragmatic sense of women and their increasing relevance at community level. At domestic level, however, they still suffer oppression from their male companions who, unlike Toloki, do not recognise women's efforts to improve the lives of their families and the community they live in:

> Toloki notices that in every shack they visit, the women are never still. They are always doing something with their hands. They are cooking. They are sewing. They are outside scolding the children. They are at the tap drawing water. They are washing clothes. They are sweeping the floors in their shacks, and the ground outside. They are closing holes in the shacks with cardboard and plastic. They are loudly joking with their neighbours while they hang washing on the line. Or they are fighting with the neighbours about children who have beaten up their own children. They are preparing to go to the taxi rank to catch taxis to the city, where they will work in the kitchens of their madams. They are always on the move. They are always on the go.
> Men, on the other hand, tend to cloud their heads with pettiness and vain pride. They sit all day and dispense wideranging philosophies on how things should be. With great authority in their voices, they come up with wise theories on how to put the world right. Then at night they demand to be given food, as if the food just walked into the house on its own (175).

Toloki recognises that his keen and largely impartial perspectives on the contrasting roles and attitudes of women and men at the settlement are very much influenced by his position as an outsider:

> Toloki hesitantly mentions these observations to Noria. He attributes his keen sense of observation to the fact that he has not lived with other human beings for many years. He therefore sees things with a fresh eye. Some of the things he sees are things he would otherwise have taken for granted, if he had been

> part of the community in which they happened. Like other men he would assume that it was normal for things to be like this, for surely this is how they were meant to be from day one of creation (176).

Toloki may indeed be considered a marginalized character in more than one way: as a solitary man who has eschewed the company of other human beings (in great measure to protect himself from getting hurt), he is an outsider in terms of human relationships; being black and underprivileged he is also an outsider in the apartheid system. While at first sight his marginalized position might seem disadvantageous, it allows him to have a fresh and relatively unbiased perspective on the new situations he is faced with, as well as the means to define his own version of history. In her discussion of different forms of the exile or the outsider, Elizabeth Grosz explains how such marginalized positions can become opportunities to write one's very own texts:

> The marginalized position of the exile, at the very least, provides the exile with the perspectives of an outsider, the kinds of perspective that enable one to see the loopholes and flaws of the system in ways that those inside the system cannot. The position of the exile automatically has access to (at least) two different kinds of discourse and history, one defined by exclusion from a social mainstream; and one provided autonomously, from its own history and self-chosen representations. This is a position uniquely privileged in terms of social transgression and renewal (69-70).

Black South African women, who had been an important source of resistance to many race-related restrictions during apartheid, needed to reclaim their subject positions after the demise of apartheid. In 1990, the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) pressed the ANC to include gender issues in the upcoming constitutional negotiations. After the political reforms of the 1990s women have achieved new prominence in politics, not so much

nationally, but more at community level, as Toloki and Noria comment:

> Toloki wonders further why it is that the people who do all the work at the settlement are women, yet all the national and regional leaders he saw at the meeting were men (...)
> "You are right, Toloki. And I hear that it is not only here where the situation is as you describe. All over the country, in what the politicians call grassroot communities, women take the lead. But very few women ever reach the executive level. Or even the regional or branch committee levels. I don't know why it is like this, Toloki" (176).

This situation is not very different from what happens in most Western countries. We might say then that patriarchal oppression works both locally (in South Africa all ethnic groups are male centered) and globally. Even though women's political movements have been able to include concerns with gender equality within democratic debates, these have been relegated to secondary importance in relation to the elimination of racist legislation and the improvement of social and economic conditions for the very poor, regarded as more urgent priorities. In *Ways of Dying*, Mda does not establish a hierarchy of priorities, dedicating equal attention to social, economic and gender issues in their mutually imbricated connections and exploring creative ways of dealing with any type of oppression, whether it be racial, class or gender-induced.

Despite all the ways of dying described in the novel, the final chapters focus on the possibility of finding ways of living even in difficult times. As Mervis explains, "Mda writes past an apartheid which has resulted in the isolation of the individual (…) towards an affirmation of fundamental humanity and solidarity" (Mervis, 49). Noria helps Toloki forgive his father and Nefolovhodwe and also teaches him how to live in a community. Similarly, Toloki helps Noria mourn the second death of her son and regain her active role in the

community by teaching her about the empowering possibilities of creativity.

However, it is only after mourning their past sorrows and losses in a ceremony of mutual cleansing that Noria and Toloki fully recover their artistic personalities. Noria regains her magical and inspiring ability to sing, thus recuperating her role as a muse, and inspiring Toloki to finally draw human figures. The atmosphere created by the mysterious power of Jwara's figurines, the magic of Noria's singing and the joy caused by Toloki's drawings point towards a more hopeful future. Mda's optimistic ending stresses the relevance of including what is usable from the past in the creative reconstruction of present and future times, as well as the healing power of creativity. All the forms of artistic expression recovered at the end of the novel represent a strong cultural potential that is nonetheless also connected with the past. Like the New Year approaching, they raise feelings of hope, pleasure and beauty, which have the potential to replace the past feelings of suffering and discrimination. The recovery of previously numbed African cultural idioms underlines the potential of their contribution toward the social and cultural development of marginalised populations. Mda's novel thus emphasises the relevance of a wider social and cultural awareness and this is visible not only in the narrative itself but also through the literary devices used.

In its portrayal of creativity and solidarity as crucial conditions for social development, as well as in its exploration of innovative literary devices, Mda's novel seems to be reworking Ndebele's appeal for a change of discourse in South African literature "from the rhetoric of oppression to that of process and exploration" ("Rediscovery", 73). In spite of the violent contexts within which the characters live their lives, *Ways of Dying* emphasises the possibility of humanising and dignifying both ways of living and dying through the application of a

sense of community as well as through creative expression that revisits (but not exclusively) African cultural idioms.

Blending realistic and fantastic elements in *Ways of Dying*, Mda thus creates an important space for the representation of the struggles of ordinary people in South Africa, while stressing their creative and collective attempts at survival, as Courau and Murray argue:

> In considering the tensions between the forces of colonial and post-colonial history, we might argue that Mda reaches towards postmodernism, rejecting modes that monolithically define human experience in favour of those that acknowledge shifting boundaries and discontinuity. *Ways of Dying* clearly illustrates many of these postmodern aesthetic qualities, as the author challenges official constructions of history and gives a voice to the silenced. Yet the blurring of real and fantastical elements in Mda's text, while evidence of his attempts to decentre received notions of black self and identity, gestures towards the existence of a black self, which, while not coherent, *does* exist and is resourceful in overcoming the cruelties and limitations of the postmodern urban experience by turning postmodern plays of identity towards the discovery of a self, which, for Toloki, is at once ludic and material. Mda thus offers the reader small histories, which displace the primacy of official History, even rendering them visible as a frame of reference (94, italics in the original).

In their analysis of how Mda resorts to certain postmodern elements in *Ways of Dying*, Courau and Murray stress that which is one of the most striking characteristics of Mda's novels, i.e. a challenge to official constructions of History by replacing them with more personal and frequently neglected histories. It might be argued that Mda adapts the characteristics of story proposed by André Brink earlier in the Introduction as being particularly pertinent for the new South African fiction:

> story as the outcome of a process of internalization and personalization; story as the construction of a version of the

> world; and story as the embodiment of an imagining or a complex of imaginings (38).

These features, which underline apparent distinguishing aspects between history and story, but which do not reject the possibility of interconnections between the two notions, are hinted at in *Ways of Dying*, but are given further emphasis in *The Heart of Redness*, as will be seen in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

The Heart of Redness comprises two narrative strands: one which is set in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, and a historical narrative that recovers the 1856-57 "Cattle Killing Movement" and discloses the early encounters between the Xhosa people and the British colonizers. In "Invidious Interpreters: The Post-Colonial Intellectual in *The Heart of Redness*", Mike Kissack and Michael Titlestad underline the manner in which past and present, history and fiction become intertwined in Mda's novel to present a portrayal of the challenges faced by post-apartheid South Africa:

> Mda establishes an engaging dialectic between retrospective evaluation and prospective visions as he reconstructs the momentous event of the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856-57, tracing the legacy of this event for the Xhosa inhabitants of Qolorha-by-Sea and portraying the constraints and limitations that this historical memory, with its attendant values and expectations, imposes upon the present. In Mda's imaginative synthesis of historical reality and fictional construction, he presents us with a scenario of post-apartheid transformation, which is deeply cognisant of the constraining presence of the past on people's anticipations of a better future (152-153).

No moment in South Africa's recent history has been more pregnant with these anticipations than the country's first democratic elections in 1994, and it is for this event that Camagu, the protagonist of the contemporary narrative in *The Heart of Redness*, decides to return to South Africa and find a position that will allow him to contribute to the development of the country, after almost thirty years spent in

exile in the United States, where he obtained the highest academic and professional qualifications. The various parallels that can be drawn between the character's and the writer's background - the Xhosa origin, the decades spent in exile in the United States, the qualifications in the area of development communication and the return after the demise of apartheid in order to participate in the country's development – are not coincidental, but intentional, as Meg Samuelson points out in "Nongqawuse, National Time and (Female) Authorship in *The Heart of Redness*":

> Like Mda, Camagu returns to South Africa after the democratic elections following an extended period of exile. Camagu is quickly disabused of any idealised notions of the South African "miracle" and becomes the spokesman for Mda's strongly worded critique of the "new" South Africa (237).

In the second chapter of the novel Camagu recalls the many unsuccessful job interviews he attended, and which helped him realize that having the best qualifications is not necessarily a prerequisite to obtaining a job:

> He never learned the freedom dance. He was already in exile when it was invented. While it became fashionable at political rallies, he was completing a doctoral degree and working in the communications department of an international development agency in New York. He regrets now that he acquired so much knowledge in the fields of communication and economic development but never learned the freedom dance (28-29).

The resentment felt by Camagu at the beginning of the contemporary narrative over not being able to find a job is harboured mainly against the "Aristocrats of the Revolution", who are described in the novel as:

> an exclusive club that is composed of the ruling elites, their families and close friends. Some of them were indeed leaders of the freedom struggle, while others had used their status and wealth to snake their way into the very heart of the organization (33). [1]

Even though he could have easily become a member of that group, and therefore achieved a top position among the new South African political and socio-economic elite, he chooses to maintain his independence and refuses to associate with the nepotistic attitudes he is so critical of:

> Camagu could easily have benefited from this system if he had played his cards right from the beginning. He knew a lot of people in exile, many of whom were prominent members of the Aristocrats of the Revolution. He had even gone to school with some of them. He had been involved in antiapartheid demonstrations in various capitals of the world with a number of them. It would have been easy to attach himself to them, or even buy a membership card. But he chose to remain independent, and to speak out against what he called patronage (33).

[1] Covering South Africa's 2009 democratic general election in "Why South Africa's Over the Rainbow", Alex Perry attended an ANC campaign event where he came across political leaders and supporters who could easily fit Mda's portrayal of the "Aristocrats of the Revolution": "On a warm summer's day in mid-January, South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress, held a rally in East London on the country's southern coast to launch its campaign for re-election. Inside the city's stadium, in a pen between the stage and a sea of supporters in the ANC colors of yellow, black and green, stood the party's VIPs. Many of the men wore Gucci and the women Prada, but mixed in with them were 60 or so people, of both sexes, in combat fatigues whose camo caps identified them as veterans of Umkhonto we Sizwe ('Spear of the Nation'), the ANC's disbanded guerrilla wing. A well-dressed young man whose baseball cap announced he was a fan of the Porsche World Roadshow, chatted to another in a scarlet T-shirt that declared: 'Let's all young people Join [sic] the Young Communist League of South Africa to crush capitalism as a brutal system and replace it by communism'. The contradictions were on show even in the parking lot, where Range Rovers, BMWs and Mercedes-Benz were pasted with giant ANC stickers promising to 'Build a Caring Society'" (27).

Again, a parallel may be observed here between Camagu and Mda, as the novelist has conceded that he too had the opportunity to become one of the "Aristocrats of the Revolution", but preferred to keep his independence:

> It is a choice that I made as a writer. I could easily be one of the "Aristocrats of the Revolution". I have the pedigree. I could have been a millionaire like all those Black Economic Empowerment millionaires. But for me, that would be something like being in prison. I want to be free. Part of my freedom is that I don't owe anybody anything. I am not beholden to anybody. I got no favours from anyone. I am able to be critical when I feel like it. This decision was made by me, was made for me, by the nature of the person that I am. It would have been stifling to be part of the system (Wark).[2]

The denunciation of the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" in Mda's novel corresponds indeed to one of the most expected thematic and representational developments in post-apartheid literature, as Lewis Nkosi argues in the article "The republic of letters after the Mandela Republic":

> Regarding the thematics that emerge from the sudden collapse of apartheid, one which hardly merits much consideration since it was already so predictable that some writers were already producing novels in anticipation of such a move, is of course the

[2] Even in the context of democratic South Africa, Mda cannot completely separate his political from his artistic persona. When asked to comment on how his political commitment always appears to emerge clearly in his writings, Mda admits that even though he tries to present various, at times even opposing, political and social perspectives in his literary works, they should nevertheless not be regarded as wholly objective or impartial: "I try to understand both sides, you see. I'm from the new oppressed, that is my side. But I can't just condemn the other side. I need to understand the other side as well, to understand their perspective. (…) Of course, I'm biased. I am the writer and my own values will come through. I cannot be objective. I do not try to be objective. In fact, I don't believe in that kind of thing, objectivity and all that, but I can do my best to try and understand the other side so that I reflect their perspective as well (…). It's a balanced kind of portrayal of the situation in South Africa today, because when my side becomes corrupt here, I say so. When they are elected to serve the poor and they start giving houses to themselves, I point that out. When they become buffoons and they become ridiculous, I point that out as well, you see" (Kachuba).

> shift of emphasis from race to class and the predictable emergence of a voracious black bourgeoisie hastily attempting to accumulate as much wealth, as quickly as their white counterparts had done, a process inevitably accompanied by much corruption (250).

Four years after arriving in Johannesburg full of expectations, and yet still unable to find a job consistent with his qualifications, Camagu thus joins the group of disenchanted intellectuals who have become increasingly disappointed with the directions the New South Africa appears to be following, and which do not include them:

> He was at Giggles, a toneless nightclub on the ground floor, when he decided to take a walk. He is a regular at Giggles because he lives on the fourth floor of this building. He does not need to walk the deadly streets of Hillbrow for a tipple.
> Most of Giggles' patrons are disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of this new society. He is one of them too, and constantly marvels at the irony of being called an exiled in his own country (26).

According to Erik Peeters, who analyses the role of Camagu in "The Accidental Activist: Reading Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* as a parody of the disappointed African intellectual", the initial reactions of disillusionment towards the social and political situation of post-apartheid South Africa displayed by Mda's protagonist seem to fit the figure of the disenchanted radical intellectual, which has become a common trope in African literature.[3] This character, which can be found in the works of such influential African writers as Chinua Achebe (*A Man of the People*), Ngugi wa Th'iongo (*Petals of Blood*) and Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters*), arises in the context of a

[3] Peeters supports his study of Mda's main character on the descriptions of the disempowered radical intellectual provided by Neil Lazarus in *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990).

certain historical perspective that regards the political, social and economic trajectory of African states from colonial occupation to national independence and beyond as one of decline. Like the majority of these pessimistic intellectuals, Camagu fails to realize that the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 mark only the beginning of a complex process of transformation in the country, regarding them instead in some way as a realized achievement of that process. As will be seen later, when Camagu gets involved in the debate over the tourist project designed for a small Eastern Cape seaside village, and as he becomes aware through his conversations with the villagers of the various perspectives regarding the issue of development, he recognizes that discussing the most suitable type of political and economic development to follow at local level might prove more useful and much more satisfying than his initial project of joining a governmental department or a private company, where the discussion of local interests would probably not take place. Very importantly too, Camagu realizes that by conceiving alternative developmentalist approaches it is possible to empower local populations, and through this overcome or circumvent the threat of political and economic decline.[4]

[4] Zim's son and Qukezwa's brother, Twin, follows an inverted path from that of Camagu, moving from the small village of Qolorha to the big city of Johannesburg in search of better opportunities to develop his artistic vocation. Unable to find customers who might be interested in his realistic carvings, Twin dies alone and miserable in Hillbrow (Camagu only finds out at the end of the novel that it was at Twin's wake that he met NomaRussia, the woman who led him to Qolorha): "Twin had been frustrated for a long time. No one was buying his carvings anymore, for he carved people who looked like real people. No one wanted such carvings. Buyers of art were more interested in twisted people. People without proportion. People who grew heads on their stomachs and eyes at the back of their heads. Grotesque people with many arms and twisted lips on their feet. Twin refused to create things that distorted reality. He could only carve realistic figures the way that Dalton had taught him to. He starved and died a pauper. He was mourned by the aged and forgotten in a tattered tent on top of a multistory building in Hillbrow (266). Harry Sewlall argues in "The Ecological Imperative in *The Heart of Redness*" that Twin's tragic destiny may be connected to the contrast between the artificiality of city life and its associated phenomena, including artistic reception, and the natural and cultural potential found in a traditional African village such as Qolorha: "The

Camagu's accusations of corruption and nepotism directed at the "Aristocrats of the Revolution", who have become particularly powerful in post-apartheid South African society, seem to be in line with the attitudes of disenchanted intellectuals as identified by Neil Lazarus. Such observers commonly hold the political leaders of independent African nations as those responsible for the economic and social failures of the post-independence period. For the majority of them, as for Camagu, very little or no hope remains for the future

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satirical treatment of intellectualism in the above extract underscores the dichotomy between the sterile, metropolitan world of high art, with its connoisseurs and charlatans, and the plenitudinous world once inhabited by Twin and his ancestors, the promise of which still exists in the worldview of Qukezwa, the sister of Twin, in the village of Qolorha-by-Sea" (222). Even though resorting to an essentialist and polarized perspective on city life and village life, Sewlall points to one of the factors behind Twin's unsuccessful artistic career, i.e. the public's preconceived expectations of what African works of art should look like, as Qukezwa's discourse denotes:

> "It is Dalton's fault," Qukezwa wails. He is the one who taught my brother to create beautiful people who looked like real people. He pretends to know everything, so he should have known that people of the city who have money to buy carvings don't like beautiful people. Twin could have been successful with his original stumpy bottlelike people.
> Camagu agrees that perhaps Twin's original work could have had a market because of its quaintness and folksiness" (267).

From Camagu's comments, it appears as though Twin's original work has a lot in common with the strange-looking figurines created by Jwara, Toloki's father, in *Ways Of Dying* (see chapter 2, pages 87-89)**.** The folksy and kitschy characteristics of Jwara's figurines and Twin's original carvings are likely to be appreciated because they somehow challenge the notions people have conceived of traditional African art, as Zoë Wicomb explains: "It is no accident that the most vibrant cultural production among black people is in the visual arts, where poorly educated artists produce works that have more in common with Western postmodernism than with that mythical referent we so fondly think of as traditional Africa" ("Culture", 180). It might be argued that the reactions to African works of art (or perhaps rather, works of art produced in Africa) explored in both of Mda's novels question essentialist conceptions and underline complex processes of cultural exchange, such as those signalled by Kwame Gyekye in *Tradition and Modernity*: "Much of Europe's borrowing and assimilation of African art probably took place after the middle of the eighteenth century, that is, during the modern era. It can thus be said that, despite its origin in Europe, modernity took on elements from other, non-European (non-Western) sources. But not only that: the fact that modernity, based in Europe, thought it appropriate to take on and assimilate elements from non-European sources seems to suggest that the non-European elements were themselves modern, or at least bore the tinge of modernity" (269).

of Africa. Camagu's decision to go back to the United States signals his disappointment with the current political and social situation of South Africa and his disbelief in the prospects of impending change. Ironically, while Camagu accuses those he views as the culprits for his feeling useless and exiled in his own country, leaving him no option but to return once more to the United States, he criticizes others for doing the same: "Whining and whingeing is the pastime of this new democratic society, thinks Camagu, not recognizing the fact that he was doing exactly the same thing for the greater part of the wake" (32). As in *Ways of Dying*, in *The Heart of Redness* Mda constantly resorts to ambivalence as a representation of characters' mental geography. For instance, through the character of Camagu, who as we have already seen has a lot in common with his own persona, Mda denounces the abuses of power by post-apartheid ruling elites, while criticising the pessimistic and passive attitudes displayed by disillusioned intellectuals, via the exploration in the narrative of ways to challenge those attitudes and to find alternative developmental approaches for post-apartheid South Africa. For Kissack and Titlestad, the ambivalent attitudes demonstrated by Camagu, made evident in his attempts at mediating the conflict between Believers and Unbelievers are a sign of his role in the novel as a post-colonial intellectual:

> In the figure of Camagu, Mda provides a vivid portrayal of the constitutive features of a post-colonial intellectual confronting the dilemmas and challenges of a secular and protean world. Such intellectuals appreciate the constraints of their cultural, linguistic and historical inheritance, acknowledge the necessity for considered intervention, while simultaneously recognising that they can never occupy a position of scrutiny and influence that will secure complete consensus and evade the invidious consequences of their pronouncements, recommendations and actions. At best, they can strive to emulate the virtue of prudence, which attempts to translate the general precepts of a just and fair proposal into a concrete application in particular

> circumstances, knowing and anticipating that these will be provocative, antagonistic and transgressive. Such thought and action can never culminate in any final reconciliation or resolution, but must contend with the prospects of indefinite conflict, negotiation and reformulation, immersed in a process of continually reconfigured alliances and compromises as the task of social reform is conceived and implemented (166).

On the eve of his departure to a second American exile, Camagu accidentally finds himself at a wake in Hillbrow[5] where the beauty and angelic voice of a mysterious young woman named NomaRussia produce such a mesmerizing effect on him that he ends up following her to the Eastern Cape seaside village Qolorha-by-Sea. It seems that beauty, initially in the shape of a young woman, has the power to restore some hope to the disenchanted Camagu and to trigger a dream-like search for something that may render meaning to his return to South Africa:

> Camagu used to see himself as a pedlar of dreams. That was when he could make things happen. Now he has lost his touch. He needs a pedlar of dreams himself, with a bagful of dreams waiting to be dreamt. A whole storage full of dreams (36).

[5] Over the years, the inner city residential neighbourhood of Hillbrow in Johannesburg has been an important part of the South African imaginary for its multicultural and multiracial characteristics. While initially meant to be a "whites only" area in the 1970s, it quickly became a place where people of various ethnicities lived together, welcoming white hippy students and non-conformist artists, thus gaining a cosmopolitan and progressive status. In the 1980s, poor planning, lack of investment and rapid population growth led to the decay of the area, which became a haven for drug-addicts, prostitutes and gangsters. In the post-apartheid period it has been taken over by immigrants from other African countries, degenerating into a place where crime has become commonplace (Peeters, 35), a situation that deeply distresses Camagu: "He did not dare go onto the streets. Throughout the night they swarm with restless humanity. Hillbrow never sleeps. Yet he is dead scared of this town. It is four years since he came back from his American exile, but he still has not got used to the fact that every morning a number of dead bodies adorn the streets" (27). Hillbrow is also the setting of an acclaimed novel by Phaswane Mpe, one of the most promising contemporary black South African novelists, who died prematurely at the age of 34. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe dealt for the first time with the challenges brought by the post-apartheid era to inner-city life in South Africa, including poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and the growing wave of xenophobia against black immigrants from other parts of Africa.

As he arrives in Qolorha, Camagu is instantly captivated by the village's beauty:

> As Camagu drives his Toyota Corolla on the gravel road he concludes that a generous artist painted the village of Qolorha-by-Sea, using splashes of lush color. It is a canvas where blue and green dominate. It is the blue of the skies and the distant hills, of the ocean and the rivers that flow into it. The green is of the meadows and the valleys, the tall grass and the usundu palms (55).

Beauty thus drives and attaches Camagu to Qolorha. He arrives in Qolorha on a quest for a local beauty, but even though he cannot locate her immediately, he ends up staying, principally due to the effects the tranquil beauty of the seaside village has on him, as he admits: "My soul has been captured by this valley" (116). Perhaps not coincidentally, Mda has revealed that the beauty he encountered in the Eastern Cape provided an inspirational setting for *The Heart of Redness*:

> A novel like *The Heart of Redness* would never exist if the place were not so beautiful. I was struck by its beauty when I went back there after many years of exile. I saw the province with fresh eyes and it struck me that it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen on this earth, so I said to myself, "It would be a waste if I didn't write a novel set there. This place deserves a novel." That's what suggested *The Heart of Redness* (Wark).

During his stay in Qolorha, Camagu becomes involved in the village's issues, especially in the discussion regarding a proposal that aims to transform the poor and neglected seaside village into an attractive tourist resort for the rich, which will include the construction of a casino and the exploitation of the village's natural resources for the practice of several watersports. However, besides providing a source of inspiration and the setting of the novel, Qolorha became centrally

relevant to the novel's eventual plot (as the site of a historical episode of great relevance for the amaXhosa people). Mda had reconnected with the historical significance of Qolorha when he was involved in a television programme concerning the legend of Nongqawuse (Mda, "A Response") and in the novel the discussion of the tourist development project will revive the ancient rivalry among the inhabitants of Qolorha between Believers and Unbelievers, referring to their position with respect to the visions of the young Xhosa prophetess. [6]

In order to provide a better understanding of the complex historical, social, political and cultural questions that have persisted from the nineteenth century to contemporary South Africa, Mda juxtaposes a historical narrative, which describes the most important events of the historical episode known as "The Cattle-Killing Movement" with a contemporary narrative. Mda bases several elements of that historical narrative, such as historical events and characters, on J.B. Peires's book *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57*, as he acknowledges in the novel's Dedication. However, as this is a work of fiction and not a history book, Mda has dramatized the intricate historical episode by creating and exploring the lives of several fictional characters, confronting them in the process with authentic events and historical figures.[7] According to Jana Gohrisch, who

[6] Mda includes an acknowledgement of Rufus Hulley in the novel's Dedication, as the knowledge shared by the trader about Qolorha, the prophetess Nongqawuse and the amaXhosa culture was relevant not only for the television script but for the novel as well.

[7] A recent article by Andrew Offenburger entitled "Duplicity and Plagiarism in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*", published in *Research in African Literatures*, has given rise to a certain amount of controversy with respect to the fine line between intertextuality and plagiarism. Offenburger has accused Mda of plagiarizing Peires's book, claiming that the historical narrative in *The Heart of Redness* has been almost entirely borrowed from *The Dead Will Arise*. His exhaustive analysis of the similarities between the two books includes several examples of paraphrasing and even a graph to demonstrate the "Trend in the Pattern of Borrowed Text" (14), but

focuses on the contributions of cultural exchange to the analysis of the representation of history in postcolonial literature in "Cultural Exchange and the Representation of History in Postcolonial Literature", both Mda and Peires engage in a highly ambitious representation of history that seeks compromise beyond simplistic dichotomies, and therefore "reject the still widespread white and black myths of the Cattle-Killing, which see it either as a chiefs' plot against the whites or as a manipulation of the prophetess by George Grey, the colonial Governor" (240). In the historical narrative, Mda offers the readers the two perspectives regarding those myths:

> This attitude reinforced Twin-Twin's view that The Man Who Named Ten Rivers had planned the whole cattle-killing movement. And that he had cleverly invented these prophecies and used Nongqawuse, Mhlakaza, and Nombanda to propagate them among the amaXhosa people. He wanted the amaXhosa to destroy themselves with their own hands, saving the colonial government from dirtying its hands with endless wars. This view was gaining currency among those Unbelievers who were not Christians. (…)

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only a faint reference to the theory of intertextuality and almost no mention of the novel's other narrative, as important as the historical narrative, set in contemporary South Africa. In the same volume of the journal Mda responded to the accusations by stressing the fictional character of his work, and revealing how he resorted to intertextual cross-fertilization: "*The Heart of Redness* is a work of fiction and not a history textbook. Historical record is only utilized in the novel to serve my fiction – to give it context, for instance. In the historical segments the fiction centers on the patriarch Xikixa, his sons Twin and Twin-Twin, and his daughter-in-law Qukezwa. All these are fictional characters created from my imagination. But the world they inhabit comes directly from historical record (Jeff Peires's *The Dead Will Arise*) and from the oral tradition. (…) when my fictional characters interact with historical characters such as Mlanjeni, Mhlakaza and Nongqawuse the events surrounding these characters come directly from Peires's book. That is why I have credited Peires in all editions and translations of *The Heart of Redness* as the sole source for all my material that comes from historical record" (1). For most trained readers, this explanation would be unnecessary, as Mda's reference to Peires's book in the novel's Dedication would immediately alert them to the use of the historian they will find in the historical narrative. Long before this controversy, and resorting to the theory of intertextuality, J.U. Jacobs had explained in "Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: The Novel as *Umngqokolo*" that literary texts are not self-contained or wholly original entities, as they are subject to various influences during their process of production.

> Those Unbelievers who were Christians, such as Ned and Mjuza, did not agree with this view. They echoed The Man Who Named Ten Rivers' view that Nongqawuse's visions were nothing more than a plot by Sarhili and his friend, Moshoeshoe of the Basotho nation, to starve the amaXhosa into rebellion against the British Empire (157).

However, in the contemporary narrative those myths are deconstructed through the character of Camagu, who, attempting to act as a mediator between the past and the present, Believers and Unbelievers, tradition and modernity, presents an alternative explanation for Nongqawuse's prophecies:

> "Believers are sincere in their belief. In this whole matter of Nongqawuse I see the sincerity of belief (…) It is the same sincerity of belief that has been seen throughout history and continues to be seen today where those who believe actually see miracles".(…)
> "What I am saying is that it is wrong to dismiss those who believed in Nongqawuse as foolish," says Camagu. "Her prophecies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the amaXhosa nation" (245).

In a complicated time for the amaXhosa, who were facing the advances of the British into their territory, as well as the terrible effects of the lung disease imported from Europe, which was decimating their cattle, Nongqawuse prophesied that the ancestors of the amaXhosa would rise from the sea to destroy the invading British settlers if the amaXhosa killed all their cattle and destroyed their crops. This prophecy occasioned massive killings of cattle in amaXhosa territories in 1857 and originated a division among the amaXhosa population between those who believed it – the Believers- and those who did not – the Unbelievers. While the Believers killed their cattle because they trusted their traditional belief system to overcome the British invaders, the Unbelievers preferred to look for alternative means of overcoming their plight. Beyond the mere

question of believing the prophecies or not, as it is presented in Mda's novel, the rift among the amaXhosa people can be seen as a symbol of the manner in which they regard their culture when faced with an unsettling, foreign element, in this case, British colonial power. The Believers' confidence in traditional structures of knowledge and belief to help them repel the British settlers who were invading their lands and destroying their culture can be seen as an attempt to define and preserve their historical and cultural identities, usually implicit but rendered active by the need to reject the categories of the outsiders:

> Only the resurrection of the dead could restore the elder's dignity. And the dignity of all the amaXhosa people, dead or alive. It would bring about a regeneration of the earth. The new redeemer that the girl-prophets talked about, son of Sifuba-Sibanzi the Broad-Chested One, would lead this re-enactment of the original creation. The long-departed relatives of the amaXhosa people would come back from the world of the ancestors and would once more walk the earth of the living. The white colonists would disappear. So would the lungsickness that they had brought across the oceans (129).

On the other side of the conflict, the Unbelievers struggle to survive by seeking alternative forms of resistance to the British occupation, but their desperate situation eventually forces them to establish alliances with the British and their supporters:

> This made Twin-Twin very uncomfortable. His unbelief in the false prophets – beginning with Mlanjeni and now including Nongqawuse and all the others who were emerging and preaching the same cattle-killing message – had forced him to form a strange alliance with people who had deserted their own god for the god of the white man. People like Ned and Mjuza, who were descendants of amaXhosa heroes but were now followers of white ways (85).

Twin-Twin's unbelief detached him from his fellow Xhosa Believers and ironically brought him closer to the colonizers and their

supporters, but he did not abandon amaXhosa customs for British ones or even his belief in the ancient prophets for Christianity: "His unbelief in Nongqawuse was not unbelief in the rites, rituals, and customs of the amaXhosa, and in the god who had been revealed by the likes of Ntsikana and Nxele" (85). In more extreme cases, some Unbelievers even abandoned amaXhosa traditions to adopt British culture and education, which they regarded as superior. In the contemporary narrative the disagreements over the issue of development between the followers of the Believers and the Unbelievers similarly result from their assessment of aspects related to their culture when challenged by an external factor which will almost certainly bring substantial changes to their lives (in this case, the tourist development project). The two oppositional interpretations of Nongqawuse's prophecies are restored in the twentieth century by the leaders of the two conflicting factions, in an attempt to obtain guidance from the past in order to deal with the complex questions they are faced with in the present. It might be argued that the division of the amaXhosa into Believers and Unbelievers over historical and cultural phenomena parallels the distinction between cultural revivalists and cultural antirevivalists that Gyekye signals, and which is based upon their contrasting awareness of and attitudes displayed towards their cultural past:

> Now, the consciousness of a people of their cultural past, that is, of the cultural values, practices, institutions, and achievements of their forebears, evokes diverse, even opposing, sentiments among them. For, while some of them, with nostalgic sentiments, would, as we have seen, argue for and urge the revival of the indigenous cultural past, others may evince totally negative attitudes – attitudes almost disdainful and condemnatory of most, if not all, of the inherited ancestral cultural values and practices (233).

According to Jana Gohrisch, in the contemporary narrative, "While the Believers cling to the sense of history as hope, Unbelievers read it as defeat" (243). Although in the past the consequences of the conservative position assumed by the Believers drove the Xhosa people into despair, by stressing the importance of preserving their culture (in a comprehensive sense that includes not only its cultural manifestations, but the conservation of natural resources as well) their attitude towards development in the twentieth century is now a radical one. In the contemporary narrative, Mda ironically inverts the positions of "belief" and "unbelief", as Kissack and Titlestad indicate:

> The historical Believers in the prophecies of Nongqawuse express themselves as Unbelievers in the promise of progress and change, while the historical Unbelievers in the prophecy become the Believers in modernisation. The respective adherents to the historical divide maintain their allegiances, but now the issue has changed, as has the designation of their fractions in terms of the notions of "belief" and "unbelief" (159).

Between the mid-nineteenth century when the conflict began, and the post-apartheid years that saw its revival, there was a type of vacuum during the days of the so-called Middle Generations, corresponding to a period of time in which more divisive questions were neglected: "during the Middle Generations (…) people were more concerned with surviving and overcoming their oppression. They did not have time to fight about the perils of belief and unbelief" (5-6). Even though it is never overtly identified as such in the novel, it is clear that this long period of time, during which black people were so occupied in trying to survive and fighting oppression that they almost forgot about the differences among themselves, corresponds to the years of apartheid.

Contrasting with 1960s novels of decolonisation (and in the South African context, with anti-apartheid novels) that focused

predominantly on the nation and on the analysis of the effects of acculturation, considering subjects' reactions to outside influences in polarised terms, the contemporary postcolonial novel instead addresses postcolonial realities as part of a transcultural phenomenon, and considers how postcolonial subjects deal with endogenously and exogenously-induced identity conflicts. Unlike some early postcolonial novels which focused frequently on frictions that arose between the white colonizer or their values and the black colonized, the main conflict depicted in *The Heart of Redness*, although stirred by external elements, takes place among the Xhosa themselves, who, as we have seen, divide into Believers and Unbelievers over Nongqawuse's prophecies. In the historical as well as in the contemporary narrative Mda offers perspectives from both sides of the feud, without attempting to find a culprit for the dramatic situation the amaXhosa find themselves in, and without privileging one perspective over the other. However, the novel's emphasis on the perils associated with internal dissension seems to set *The Heart of Redness* apart from many postcolonial novels, because, as Gohrisch explains:

> Mda does not only write back to the white colonial masters and producers of grand narratives to teach them a lesson about precolonial past and colonial history. Rather, he aims at his black contemporaries, to whom he wants to point out the contradictions and future potential of their own local history and culture (240).

Even though Mda has admitted that he writes his novels primarily for South African readers (Wark), he is nevertheless aware of his international readership. In *The Heart of Redness*, for instance, he uses several devices to make certain aspects of the novel more accessible to a potential readership outside South Africa. These devices include a graphic representation of the characters' genealogy

at the beginning of the book and several periphrastic explanations throughout the novel regarding cultural terms and practices, historical events and figures. Given the complexity of the historical events and cultural issues explored in the novel, most of which are intrinsically connected with the amaXhosa culture, these devices are possibly directed at South African readers as well, as they also may have only a superficial knowledge of amaXhosa culture, being ignorant of many or most of the details related to those events and issues narrated in the book.

The acceptance or refusal of the tourist project by the inhabitants of Qolorha in the contemporary narrative has to do with the kind of political and economic development they envisage as the best for their village. The Unbelievers, led by Bhonco, look at the project as a classic introducer of modernization in the village, which has the potential to generate great economic possibilities:

> "The Unbelievers stand for progress," asserts Bhonco, to the assenting murmurs of his followers. (…) "We want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilized state. We want developers to come and build the gambling city that will bring money to this community. That will bring modernity to our lives, and will rid us of our redness" (92).[8]

The expression "redness" used by Bhonco to refer to backwardness and lack of civilization relates to the red ochre used by Xhosa women on their bodies and also to stain the traditional isiXhosa garments

[8] As Grant Farred stresses in "A Politics of Doubt": "The Unbelievers represent the struggle, which animated and sustained the anti-colonial project for centuries, against the misrepresentation of the 'native' as uncivilised, or 'red', in the iconography of Mda's novel, and therefore less than human. However, by reiterating so vehemently their support for 'civilisation', by trying to escape the 'heart of redness', the Unbelievers inadvertently give credence to the colonialists' representation of them" (265). Farred does not interpret the Unbelievers' defense of progress as a sign of unfaithfulness to their culture, but as a means of venting the whole community's frustration concerning the material lack they still face in the post-apartheid context (see 267).

(the isikhakha skirts), a distinctive element of amaXhosa culture. Mda uses the word in the novel's title, itself a clear allusion to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. According to Harry Sewlall, who analyses both Conrad and Mda's texts from a postcolonial perspective in the article "Deconstructing empire in Joseph Conrad and Zakes Mda":

> Metonymically, the title *Heart of Darkness* functions as a substitute for Africa, the Dark Continent as it was scripted in the European imagination. It represents, or acts as, a substitute for the African wilderness and a place which still awaits the civilizing mission of the West. *The Heart of Redness* also assumes metonymic dimensions as it is the equivalent of backwardness and the absence of enlightenment (8).[9]

On the other side of the quarrel, the Believers, led by Zim, are suspicious of the promises of richness, fearing that the luxury resort will drive them into further poverty by excluding the majority of the local population from actually benefiting from the project, while overexploiting their natural resources. Ironically, it is Zim's daughter, Qukewza, a "scatterbrained girl with a Standard Eight education who works as a cleaner at Vulindlela Trading Store" (103) who makes Camagu, holder of a "doctoral degree in communication and

[9] In "Community and Agency in *The Heart of Redness* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*", Gail Fincham draws attention to some formal similarities between Mda's and Conrad's texts, such as "their rich intertextuality, their foregrounding of the importance of the reader's role in creating the meaning of the text, their interrogation of the binary underlying Western thought and their exposure of colonial strategies of appropriation in mapping and naming" (193). However, Fincham also stresses Mda's ability to surpass, at a narrative level, Conrad's depiction of the colonial enterprise: "Conrad, a major metropolitan writer who remains always an 'outsider' in the country of his adoption, sees the coloniser in Africa as suffering from diminished agency and a loss of cultural community. Mda, as post-colonial writer, appropriates a profoundly colonial incident, which he recontextualises. He creates agency reconfiguring history and invoking memory, insisting on the possibility of meaningful community. (…) Mda creates a richly layered, vivid narrative that effectively 'writes back' to Conrad's dense, disturbing interrogation of 'barbarism' and 'civilisation'" (202).

economic development" (66) obtained in the United States, aware of this perspective for the first time:

> Camagu is taken aback both by her fervor and her reasoning. She is right. The gambling city may not be the boon the Unbelievers think it will be. It occurs to him that even during its construction, few men from the village, if any, will get jobs. Construction companies come with their own workers who have the necessary experience. Of course, a small number of jobs is better than no jobs at all. But if they are at the expense of the freedom to enjoy the sea and its bountiful harvests and the woods and the birds and the monkeys… then those few jobs are not really worth it. There is a lot of sense in what Qukezwa is saying (103).

Stubbornly holding on to the differences between their ancestors, Bhonco and Zim adopt extreme views on the subject of development. While Bhonco considers progress as wholly beneficial to Qolorha, Zim regards any change that may be brought by modernization as negative. Even though as the descendant of Twin-Twin, founder of the cult of the Unbelievers in the nineteenth century, he has always stood for progress and civilization, in the discussion of the tourist project he is influenced in his positions by his educated daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, to the point that he even rejects certain amaXhosa customs and traditions as being uncivilized, or "red":

> The Unbelievers are moving forward with the times. That is why they support the casino and the water-sports paradise that the developers want to build. The Unbelievers stand for civilization. To prove this point Bhonco has now turned to away from beads and has decided to take out the suits that his daughter bought him many years ago from his trunk under the bed. From now on he will be seen only in suits. He is in the process of persuading his wife also to do away with the red ochre that women smear on their bodies and with which they also dye their isikhakha skirts (…). Bhonco is a suit man. He even cried when he saw his beautiful reflection in one of the big windows of Vulindlela Trading Store. In any case, these suits were lovingly bought by

his daughter, and it makes her very happy when he wears them (71).

Zim, on the other hand, wishes to preserve amaXhosa customs and traditions at all costs, and fears everything modern and foreign to the amaXhosa culture as a potential threat. For Zim, the future happiness of the village depends on the return to the "pure" amaXhosa traditions that existed before the arrival of the European settlers: "This son of Ximiya talks of progress. Yet he wants to destroy the bush that has been here since the days of our forefathers. What kind of progress is that?" (92).

Tradition, however, is hardly a natural concept, occurring in relation to values and perspectives that, as can be seen, construct it very differently. However, the most common attempts to define the concept of tradition regard the transmission of the customs, beliefs and practices that apparently constitute tradition as automatic. These definitions of tradition tend to omit the dynamic importance of the various generations involved in the process of transmitting tradition(s). They fail to realise that the previous generations do not simply transmit their cultural creations, but place them at the disposal of subsequent generations who have to actively process what is made available to them. The definitions also seem to forget that subsequent generations have an active role in the making and keeping of tradition, as they either accept, refine or abandon the traditions placed at their disposal by previous generations.

Gyekye proposes a definition of tradition which includes elements that used to be ignored: "a tradition is any cultural product that was created or pursued by past generations and that, having been accepted and preserved, in whole or in part, by successive generations, has been maintained to the present" (221). This definition is interesting because it places a great emphasis on the

"successive generations" as the most important makers of tradition, as it is in their hands to articulate the tradition proposed to them by previous generations. The refinement, abandonment or need to revitalize tradition are, according to Gyekye, "the consequences of two main factors: internal criticism of the tradition undertaken from time to time, and the adoption of worthwhile or appropriate nonindigenous (or, alien) ideas, values, and practices" (222).

In his essay "New Centres of Consciousness", included in the collection of essays *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bruce King argues that "Traditions are yesterday's changes; the cultural is always intercultural" (23). Like Gyekye, King also emphasises the flexibility and permeability inherent in the notion of tradition. This aspect is particularly relevant in the case of postcolonial societies, as they have constituted, for several historical and political reasons, a site of conflict between "traditionalists wanting to construct an ideal past and modernizers embracing change" (King, 25). Most contemporary postcolonial literary works however avoid presenting tradition and modernity as simplistic polar opposites. Instead, they frequently focus on the depiction and analysis of both positive and negative aspects associated with both notions. In the two narratives of *The Heart of Redness* Mda reveals how the Xhosa people have had to juggle the wish to perpetuate ancient traditions and the challenges to those traditions brought by present circumstances, whether in the shape of early British colonialism in the past or globalization in the present. Throughout the novel Mda contrasts and relativises the arguments that divide the rational Unbelievers from the traditionalist Believers in both narratives, by avoiding essentialist or oppositional perspectives, stressing instead the transcultural characteristics of Xhosa culture. As Jacobs explains:

> The feuding fictional community of Believers and Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-Sea at the turn of the millennium are the descendents [sic] of the Middle Generation, as those who suffered under apartheid are referred to in the novel, and who in turn inherited from their nineteenth-century forebears a world massively damaged by a combination of colonialism and their own creeds. Both the 1856 and 1998 narratives are coded in terms of ambivalence and cultural heterogeneity that resonates back and forth between the past and the present (230).

Even though at first sight the reasons that divide Believers and Unbelievers in the contemporary narrative are apparently of a different order from those which have split the amaXhosa nation in two in the nineteenth century, according to Peeters, the modern battle-lines "are drawn over the same territory as in 1857 as a battle for the preservation of tradition or its complete abandonment in favour of a truncated version of westernisation" (36). In the historical narrative, as well as in the contemporary narrative, the extreme positions result in an inner division that weakens the resistance of the amaXhosa people to the foreign forces:

> The Believers starved when the ancestors failed to rise and lost their lands and control of their political destiny, the Unbelievers lost their identity. Further, the division of the amaXhosa nation into two camps effectively rendered impossible any resistance to colonial occupation (Peeters, 36).

As is evidenced in both narratives, neither outright preservation nor the utter abandonment of tradition provides the best path for the amaXhosa. The conflict between the leaders of the Believers and the Unbelievers, rekindled by the construction of the tourist resort thus diverts the villagers from the real issues that need to be discussed and constitutes a threat to the village's ability to resist further marginalization, as Dalton points out to Camagu:

> "Hey, I don't want to be part of the war between the Believers and Unbelievers."

> "Why should you? Most people here don't care about those petty quarrels. They want to see development happening. They want clean water. They want health delivery services. They see Bhonco and Zim and their small bands of followers as clowns who are holding desperately to the quarrels of the past. But the whole thing frustrates development" (116).

Newly arrived in Qolorha, Camagu initially avoids becoming directly involved in the conflict that opposes Believers and Unbelievers. However, after he decides to stay in the seaside village, captivated by its many beauties, he tries to act as a mediator in the conflict (a difficult task, given Bhonco and Zim's polarized views on the dispute). Prompted by the need to find a means of supporting himself financially in the village he has chosen to live in, Camagu also becomes an important catalyst for change by combining his own perspectives on progress with those he comes across in the village:

> Camagu, seeking a position of national prominence and wishing to influence national strategies of development, finds instead his own survival intimately tied up with the survival of a marginalised, poor community into which he has come mostly by accident. Instead of setting himself up as a leader or initiator of revolution in this community, Camagu becomes, again almost accidentally, a catalyst for change in the community by introducing different ideas into the debate between traditionalists and westernisers (Peeters, 40).

The development project Camagu envisages for Qolorha is based on his interpretation of the village's history and culture, which he formulates from the various perspectives he encounters among the villagers of Qolorha. During his stay in Qolorha, Camagu engages in the discovery of the complex history of the village, especially through the conversations he has with some of Qolorha's inhabitants. Through his dialogues with Bhonco and Zim he becomes aware of the two principal versions of the history of Nongqawuse, but the most

significant contributions to Camagu's position on the issue of development arise in his discussions with Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa, on the general issues of civilization and primitiveness, and through the exchanges with Qukezwa, Zim's daughter, on tradition and nature. The frequent arguments he has with John Dalton over the best developmental alternatives for Qolorha are also fundamental in the shaping of his own proposal for a sustainable development project. These different viewpoints, which Mda cleverly presents through characters who are more than mere mouthpieces of ideological positions, have an important function in the narrative itself, but they are also directed at the readers, who are implicitly interpellated in the assessment of the questions the novel explores.

Initially, Camagu appears closer to the modernization ideals supported by the Unbelievers, especially thanks to the close relationship he establishes with Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya. In remote Qolorha, the intelligent, educated and beautiful Xoliswa unsurprisingly becomes agreeable company for Camagu. For the villagers of Qolorha, who observe the growing closeness between the two, Camagu and Xoliswa seem to be the perfect couple:

> It is clear that the community has been worried that their headmistress might die an old maid. It is well known that men are intimidated by educated women. And by "educated women" they mean those who have gone to high schools and universities to imbibe western education, rather than those who have received traditional isiXhosa education at home and during various rites of passage. Men are more at home with the kind of woman they can trample under their feet. Even educated men prefer uneducated women. Perhaps this stranger from Johannesburg is a different breed of educated man. He is not intimidated by the dispassionate beauty. Otherwise why would he have been seen with her every day for the last two weeks? People have eyes. They can see. They have ears. They can hear (97).

In this passage the narrator conveys the register of the village gossip, which can already picture the union between Camagu and Xoliswa after what they have been seeing and hearing. However, the sharp and quasi-feminist comments on men's preference for uneducated women may be attributed to an implied author associated with Mda.

During Camagu and Xoliswa's frequent conversations, however, most of which are on the questions of tradition and civilization, Camagu becomes increasingly aware that their positions are irreconcilable. Whereas Xoliswa, whose upbringing in a family of Unbelievers and formal education has inculcated her with the values of the colonizing power, regards all tradition as detrimental and everything Western as superior (she mentions Dolly Parton and Eddie Murphy as supposedly prominent cultural references) and potentially beneficial, Camagu is not indifferent to Xhosa traditions, some of which he even observes, in spite of having spent most of his life out of South Africa. The contrast between the two becomes manifest when Camagu recognizes a brown mole snake the cleaner of the hotel has found in his bed as the totem snake of his clan and does not allow it to be killed, as its visit is a signal of good luck:

> Camagu is beside himself with excitement. He has never been visited by Majola, the brown mole snake that is the totem of his clan. He has heard in stories how the snake visits every newborn child; how it sometimes pays a visit to chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune. He is the chosen one today (98).

This episode, which takes place when Camagu is about to abandon Qolorha to return to the United States, has the result of making him more secure about his perspective on tradition and gives rise to different interpretations among the villagers of Qolorha. When they

talk about the episode, Xoliswa tells Camagu she cannot understand how an educated man can believe in customs she sees as barbaric:

> "You are an educated man, Camagu, all the way from America. How do you expect simple peasants to give up their superstitions and join the modern world when they see educated people like you clinging to them?"
> "I am not from America. I am an African from the amaMpondomise clan. My totem is the brown mole snake, Majola. I believe in him, not for you, not for your fellow villagers, but for myself" (150).

Xoliswa's attitude towards the villagers may be seen as patronizing, for she thinks they might be influenced by Camagu's adherence to Xhosa customs. Camagu, who is a strong believer in self-reliance, is nevertheless aware that the respect he has now shown for their/his customs has earned him the admiration of the villagers, who had hitherto regarded him as a mere stranger:

> As they walk away, they talk of Camagu in great awe. They did not expect a man with such great education, a man who has lived in the lands of the white people for thirty years, to have such respect for the customs of his people. He is indeed a man worthy of their respect (98-99).

The individual and collective feelings raised by the appearance of the snake, and which contribute to a greater proximity between Camagu and the community of Qolorha, have a common origin in the collective custom of totemism, as Claude Lévi-Strauss explains:

> We do not know, and never shall know, anything about the first origin of beliefs and customs and the roots of which plunge into a distant past; but, as far as the present is concerned, it is certain that social behavior is not produced spontaneously by each individual under the influence of emotions of the moment. Men do not act, as members of a group, in accordance with what each feels as an individual; each man feels as a function of the

> way in which he is permitted or obliged to act. Customs are given as external norms before giving rise to internal sentiments, and these non-sentient norms determine the sentiments of individuals as well as the circumstances in which they may, or must, be displayed (*Totemism*, 70).

Her passionate defence of civilization, which makes Xoliswa reject anything vaguely related to Xhosa traditions, provides a further context for her strong feeling of shame in relation to the Nongqawuse episode:

> Xoliswa Ximiya is not happy that her people are made to act like buffoons for these white tourists. She is miffed that the trails glorify primitive practices. Her people are like monkeys in a zoo, observed with amusement by white foreigners with John Dalton's assistance. But, worst of all, she will never forgive Dalton for taking them to Nongqawuse's Pool, where they drop coins for good luck. She hates Nongqawuse. The mere mention of her name makes her cringe in embarrassment. That episode of the story of her people is a shame and a disgrace (96).

In one of the novel's most ironical moments, with more than a hint of magical realism, Xoliswa, a fierce Unbeliever of anything related to traditional customs and beliefs, and who has even decided to leave the "redness" of Qolorha to join the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" in Pretoria, inherits her father's scars of history: "She wakes up one day and finds that the scars of history have erupted on her body. All of a sudden her ancestor's flagellation has become her flagellation. She rebels against these heathen scars" (261). Even though the Unbelievers want to forget their history, which they regard as debilitating, particularly the Nongqawuse episode, it seems they are condemned to carry the scars of that history on their very bodies.

The other female character Camagu becomes emotionally involved with appears to be the very antithesis of Xoliswa. Qukezwa lacks the charm, beauty and high level of formal education Xoliswa possesses,

but her knowledge and appreciation of the Xhosa and Khoikhoi cultures captivate Camagu. He discloses his admiration for Qukezwa when, talking with Xoliswa, he compares the two: "That child, as you call her, is not dismissive of beautiful things. Where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens, and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty" (189). Beyond her disconcerting attitude, he is able to recognize in Qukezwa his counterpart in the struggle for the preservation of the history, culture and landscape of Qolorha against the greedy and unscrupulous development project. As has already been seen, it is Qukezwa who first alerts Camagu to the threats inherent in the proposed tourist development. His exchanges with Qukezwa, in which she instructs him on Xhosa and Khoikhoi culture and beliefs, as well as on indigenous plants and animals, increase his appreciation of traditional values and the local natural environment, and become an important motivation towards devising an alternative cooperative development project. It is also in great part thanks to Qukezwa that Camagu changes his view on the Nongqawuse episode. For Camagu, Nongqawuse represented a faint recollection from history books, which described her as "a young girl who deceived the amaXhosa nation into mass suicide" (35). In one of their meetings, Qukezwa shows him the Valley of Nongqawuse and describes the historical episode as if she had witnessed it:

> "We stood here with the multitudes", she says, her voice full of nostalgia. "Visions appeared in the water. Nongqawuse herself stood here. Across the river the valley was full of ikhamanga. There were reeds too. They are no longer there. Only ikhamanga remains. And a few aloes. Aloes used to cover the whole area. Mist often covers this whole ridge right up to the lagoon where we come from. It was like that too in the days of Nongqawuse. We stood here and saw the wonders. The whole ridge was covered with people who came to see the wonders. Many things have changed. The reeds are gone. What remains now is that

> bush over there where Nongqawuse and Nombanda first met the Strangers. The bush. Ityholo-lika-Nongqawuse" (105).

This spiritual moment causes a great impression on Camagu, who had never considered the historical episode from the Believers' perspective. Qukezwa's description induces him to question the most common versions of history that portrayed Nongqawuse and her prophecies as delirious and tragic, a portrayal that had led to a feeling of shame among the Xhosa in relation to the event. Even though he tries rationally to resist Qukezwa, for apparently he has very little in common with her, Camagu cannot help but feel fascinated with the young woman's ability to connect with the history and culture of her people:

> Camagu is seized by a bout of madness. He fights hard against the urge to hold this girl, tightly, and kiss her all over. It is different from the urge he once had: to hold and protect Xoliswa Ximiya. This woman does not need protecting. He does. He is breathing heavily as if he has just climbed a mountain, and his hands are sweating. Every part of his body has become a stranger to him. He convinces himself that this is temporary insanity: he is merely mesmerized by the romance of the place and the girl's passion for the prophets.
> Yet his heart is pumping faster than ever! (105)

In the article "Situating Ecology in Recent African Fiction", Anthony Vital interprets Qukezwa's closeness to nature as a way of perpetuating damaging ideas about women's roles. He argues that behind the association between the village and the feminine through the manner in which Camagu's interest in the village is defined in the novel (it is after a woman, NomaRussia, that he comes to Qolorha and it is also in great part due to a woman, Qukezwa, that he decides to stay in the village) "lies the old story of the vulnerable woman and her protector" (311). In fact, the male characters of Camagu and

Dalton are those evidenced at the end of the narrative as the saviours of Qolorha, while Qukezwa appears somehow relegated to the background, as she is seen performing the conventional female role of nurturing mother. Mda's representation of the two most significant female characters in *The Heart of Redness*, i.e. Qukezwa and Nongqawuse, has been described by feminist critics such as Meg Samuelson as androcentric and essentialist:

> Cast out is an image of Nongqawuse as a woman who entered the public sphere with her own gendered agenda. While the Nongqawuse of nationalist fantasies transmits the male-authored message through her mouth, Qukezwa, her representative figure in Mda's present-day narrative, transmits it through her body. Qukezwa, then, is proposed as a domesticated, culturally 'pure' Nongqawuse, her obedient womb replacing Nongqawuse's unruly, slippery voice (248).

In her feminist reading of *The Heart of Redness*, Samuelson argues that besides replacing Nongqawuse's voice with that of a male omniscient narrator (she becomes an empty vessel for the words of others), Mda, following the same position adopted by Peires in his account of the Cattle-Killing events, also deliberately omits gendered aspects contained in Nongqawuse's narrative, such as the reference to cattle, the means through which "lobola" was paid, and thereby female fertility controlled. Moreover, linking both Nongqawuse and Qukezwa with nature rather than with culture, Mda attributes to them conventionally essentialist identities:

> Women bear men's messages through their bodies and are firmly discouraged from seizing the tools of writing themselves. The 'heart of redness' beats within the breast, or womb, or a woman; the future and the pen are the preserve of men. Thus does the novel participate in an androcentric appropriation and displacement of women's authorship, even as it ostensibly focuses on a woman whose words fundamentally altered the political landscape of South Africa (243).

For Samuelson, this suppression of female agency in Mda's novel is made even more clear in the dismissal of Xoliswa Ximiya, "the only highly literate woman in the story" (243), not just from Camagu's company, as he chooses Qukezwa over her, but from the novel as well.

However, Camagu clearly adopts Qukezwa's ecological sensibility in his ecotourism project, which draws heavily on her strong connection to the history and culture of Qolorha, a type of literacy and willed agency after all. We might say that even though she does not seem to be given the same social and political appreciation as Camagu and Dalton, Qukezwa is nevertheless presented as a female saviour figure in Mda's novel, albeit associated with the role of wife and mother. The unsettling Qukezwa becomes one of the main influences in the process of self-discovery and transformation Camagu goes through in Qolorha, from disillusioned urban intellectual and man whose "unquenchable thirst for the flesh is well known" (28) into successful and fulfilled local business and family man. While these may be positive outcomes, Samuelson's critique remains difficult to rebut, particularly in the light of gender roles as being central to the realignment of tradition and modernity in contemporary South Africa.

Camagu's subject position (which informs his viewpoint on the issue of development) arises out of the intertwining of the historical and contemporary narratives in the novel and the intersection with different discourses: "Camagu is narrated into being in relation to both past and present in the history of Africa, South Africa and, in particular, the amaXhosa" (Bell, 5). Like the identity of Qolorha itself, to which he becomes intimately connected, Camagu's identity becomes drawn by both the local and the global, tradition and modernity, the past and the present, neither completely rejecting nor overtly accepting the characteristics of these apparently polarized

notions. As Vital argues, the local and indigenous cultural values Camagu discovers in Qolorha and rediscovers in himself are not presented in the novel as immune to cultural exchange, but they nevertheless become important factors in the community's resistance to the threat of environmental and economic exploitation that the construction of the hotel and casino would represent:

> if the narrative at the level of discourse works to undermine notions of a pure and authentic isiXhosa culture, one linked to place and available for an uncomplicated experience of belonging, the narrative at the level of plot, through the journey of its main character, works to recuperate a qualified form of the indigenous – and with it, a form of belonging plausibly available within conditions set by the late twentieth century. Local culture, despite awareness of hybridity and inherited divisions, involves continuities worth preserving from further subversion by outsiders – especially for the way such preservation allows rural people a chance to hold on to a measure of economic independence (308).

Qukezwa's spiritual connection to the past, evidenced in the mystical experience she shares with Camagu, helps to underline her character as perhaps the most complex and puzzling in Mda's novel. Beyond the name, the many similarities between the two seem to imply that the Qukezwa of the novel's 1998 narrative and the homonymous character in the historical narrative could even in some way be the same person. In the historical narrative, Twin marries, against his brother's wishes, a woman of Khoikhoi origin named Qukezwa. Twin becomes fascinated with Qukezwa, as she teaches him about her Khoikhoi traditions and beliefs. They name their son Heitsi, after the great Khoikhoi prophet Heitsi Eibib, son of Tsiqwa. Both great believers in Nongqawuse's prophecies, of whom they become fervent followers, Twin and Qukezwa support each other throughout the complicated times of the Cattle-Killing Movement. According to Gohrisch, this magical realist device of having characters

appear on different time levels functions in the novel as a metaphor of transtemporally connected history:

> We see the character Qukezwa appear twice: once as the Khoikhoi wife of Twin, and once as a modern woman with mythic traits. Her function in the novel is to preserve and pass on the knowledge about alternative ways of life (242).

Camagu's attraction to Qukezwa will result, in another of the novel's magical realist touches, in an immaculate conception.[10] They get married after she gives birth to a son, whom she names Heitsi. In both narratives, the characters of Qukezwa and Heitsi might be seen as metaphors for transtemporally but also transculturally connected history, as they link both different times and cultures. Indeed, *The Heart of Redness* presents, on both the historical and the contemporary narratives, several characters who find themselves in

[10] In *Ways of Dying*, Mda had already resorted to the magical realist device of the immaculate conception in the character of Noria, who miraculously conceives and gives birth, after fifteen months, to the same child she had lost a few years before. Given the strong emphasis on transculturation in *The Heart of Redness*, perhaps it is possible to interpret Qukezwa's virgin pregnancy as a combination of magical realism with the allusion to one of the most important symbols of Christianity, that of the magically conceiving Virgin Mary. We should also stress here that the nineteenth century Nongqawuse prophecies already revealed a syncretism of Xhosa and Christian religious beliefs, by combining elements of Xhosa cosmology with the Christian notions of apocalypse and resurrection. In a feminist interpretation of this episode, Samuelson argues that the immaculate conception of the contemporary Qukezwa functions as a contrast with the prostituting activities the Qukezwa of the nineteenth century narrative became involved in during the War of Mlanjeni in order to help her people (see *The Heart of Redness,* 21*).* Thus, as in *Ways of Dying*, (Noria also has to resort to prostitution at a certain stage in her life in order to survive) Mda replaces the figure of the prostitute, which signals (national) degradation under colonial conquest with the figure of Mother Africa, which is regarded as a symbol of national recovery: "Qukezwa the second is cleansed and reclaimed as a Mother Africa figure, her body uncontaminated and whole. The shift from prostitute to virgin-mother that we find in *The Heart of Redness* is one from the nation penetrated by foreign incursion to the nation redeemed through its recovery of an authentic cultural tradition. This trajectory is followed also in Mda's previous novel, *Ways of Dying*, where redemption is signaled by the movement of the central female character, Noria, from prostitute to ascetic. The story told through these women's bodies follows a linear structure, untangling narrative temporality and rearranging it into a teleological formation that stretches from colonial loss to post-colonial recovery" (Samuelson, 241).

the middle of a complex process of cultural hybridization, resulting from the contact between different cultures, motivated, among others, by phenomena such as colonization, conflicts and migration: "The network of intercultural relations that the novel depicts is (…) intricate in terms of its overall structure and presents a highly complex dynamic of identity for many of the individuals concerned (Dannenberg, 181). The characters of Qukezwa and Heitsi can be regarded as symbols par excellence of culturally hybridized identities, and particularly of multiple cultural interchanges found in and across both time levels depicted in the novel.

Another of the most challenging characters in the contemporary narrative is that of the white trader and descendant of British colonizers, John Dalton:

> Dalton is a white man of English stock. Well, let's put it this way: his skin is white like the skins of those who caused the sufferings of the Middle Generations. But his heart is an umXhosa heart. He speaks better isiXhosa than most of the amaXhosa people in the village. In his youth, against his father's wishes, he went to the initiation school and was circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people (8).

Both Dalton, a white man of British descent who speaks perfect Xhosa and who is part of the Xhosa community, considering South Africa to be his homeland, and Camagu, an educated black man of Xhosa origin who has spent most of his life in the United States, but who still has some connection to his roots and traditions (as the snake episode reveals), can be considered transcultural individuals:

> But Dalton is curious about the stranger and wants to find out more about him. They talk about Johannesburg and the political situation, and about America. Dalton is fascinated by an umXhosa man who has spent so many years living in America. He himself has never left South Africa and has spent most of his life in the Eastern Cape. Camagu cannot get over the fact that

> Dalton speaks much better isiXhosa than he'll ever be able to (57).

Like Camagu, Dalton does not wish to take sides in the conflict, but to contribute to the preservation of the village's natural and cultural heritage, while improving the villagers' quality of life. However, the two have distinct views and proposals regarding the best developmental alternative for Qolorha. Dalton is an active member of Qolorha who has initiated modernizing projects, like a water scheme, in order to contribute to the villagers' well-being. When the water scheme project is on the verge of failure, because the people who benefit from it are not paying for it, Camagu tries to convince Dalton that even though he means well, his projects are not succeeding because they tend to patronize the villagers:

> "That is the danger of doing things for the people instead of doing things with the people", adds Camagu. "It is happening throughout this country. The government talks of delivery and of upliftment. Now people expect things to be delivered to them without any effort on their part. They expect somebody to come from Pretoria and uplift them. The notions of delivery and upliftment have turned our people into passive recipients of programs conceived by so-called experts who know nothing about the lives of rural communities. People are denied the right to shape their own destiny. Things are done for them. The world owes them a living. A dependency mentality is reinforced in their minds" (180).

While his criticism is initially directed at Dalton's project, it extends to national politics. For Camagu, either at local or national level, projects can only be successful if people are directly involved in them. He tries to explain Dalton that that is one of the main differences between their projects:

> "Your people love you because you do things for them. I am talking of self-reliance where people do things for themselves. (…) This project will be fully owned by the villagers themselves

> and will be run by a committee elected by them in the true manner of cooperative societies" (248).

Camagu creates his syncretic project of a cooperative-based ecological tourist development for the community (initially a backpackers' hostel, which develops into a holiday camp) through dialogue with both Believers and Unbelievers, and especially with Dalton. The type of development proposed by Camagu for the community is also related to Mda's concepts of theatre for development and of development communication. In "Current Trends in Theatre for Development in South Africa" Mda describes the evolution of South African contemporary theatre from Protest Theatre to Theatre for Resistance in the 1970s, a change that followed those that took place in the liberation struggle, which moved from protest to challenge with the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement. Mda's main focus, however, is on Theatre for Development, which only began to gain a higher profile after the end of apartheid and is now a popular kind of theatre among South Africans. Mda argues that because it encourages the involvement of the spectators in its production, resorting to their own traditional performance modes, Theatre for Development is particularly suited to a recent democratic country like South Africa:

> Theatre for Development has the potential to be the most relevant theatre in a democratic South Africa, since it can be rooted with the people in the marginalized rural areas and urban slums. It utilizes modes of communication and of entertainment that already exist in these areas. It is the theatre of the illiterate since, in its most progressive form, it has no dramatic text that acts as a referent for the performance text. Workers and peasants together form the vast majority of the population of South Africa. Of necessity a truly South African theatre will not be that which is the sole privilege of the dominant classes, but

> that in which peasants and workers are active participants in its production and enjoyment (264).

Besides constituting a truly democratic type of theatre by allowing the active participation of the people in its production, Mda also stresses that the most progressive performances of Theatre for Development can become an important vehicle for critical analysis, resulting in critical awareness, or conscientization: "The process of conscientization involves the active participation of the people in transforming themselves by engaging in a dialogue through which they identify their problems, reflect on why the problems exist, and take action to solve the problems" (260).[11] Participating in the development projects outlined by Camagu as members of a cooperative makes the villagers more aware of their specific circumstances while increasing their own potential for initiative. Getting himself involved in the community issues, Camagu helps the villagers of Qolorha devise the means to resist the threat of a renewed colonization, now in the shape of political and economic exploitation, by resorting to their own initiative and their local resources. Behind Camagu's project there is also a strong criticism of the neo-liberal policies adopted by the post-apartheid administration, particularly the institution of black economic empowerment:[12]

> Black economic empowerment is a buzzword at places like Giggles in Johannesburg, where the habitués are always on the lookout for crumbs that fall from the tables of the Aristocrats of the Revolution. But the black empowerment boom is merely enriching the chosen few – the elite clique of black businessmen

[11] The connection between community participation and conscientization has been further developed by Mda in *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre* (1993).

[12] Very similar criticism of black economic empowerment can be found in a newspaper article entitled "We don't deify our leaders or kowtow to the ruling party" (2004), in which Mda examines the first decade of democracy in South Africa.

> who have become overnight millionaires. Or trade union leaders who use the workers as stepping-stones to untold riches for themselves. And politicians who effectively use their struggle credentials for self-enrichment. They have their snouts buried deep in the trough, lapping noisily in the name of the poor, trying to outdo one another in piggishness.
> Disillusioned with the corruption and nepotism of the city, Camagu had come to Qolorha in search of a dream. And here people are now doing things for themselves, without any handouts from the government (171-172).

For Peeters, the changes proposed by Camagu through his development project can be designated as "accidental activism":

> This form of social action, ad-hoc, local, and which mobilises the relationships built within specific communities and specific contexts, might be called a form of accidental activism. This would be a form of un-co-ordinated activism, not reliant on national frame-works or formal and thus in some way abstract political structures, but tied in with and responsive to the specific contingencies and possibilities of particular places, times and people while at the same time remaining open to more global contexts and possibilities (41).

Camagu transcends the duality between the Believers, whose position on development focuses on the preservation of local interests, and the Unbelievers, whose unconditional defense of progress opens the door to global economic influences, by combining positive aspects of both perspectives and adding his own academic and work experience, as well as his particular vision on the relevance of involving the local population in the development projects. Camagu's ecotourist project relies on and aims to protect the potential generated at local level by the historical, cultural and natural identities and resources found in Qolorha, but it depends on the forces of economic globalization that make it possible for tourists from inside and outside South Africa to be aware and take full advantage of this type of project. As Hilary

Dannenberg states in "Culture and Nature in *The Heart of Redness*", Camagu's ecotourism project for Qolorha entails a compromise between moderate global trends and local development:

> While it depicts the forces of cultural hybridisation and change as part of the relentless dynamics of human culture, the novel nevertheless states that when it comes to practical life and socio-political realities, there should be no Western-dominated cultural hybridising, since this will result in a process of assimilation into US-driven globalisation and the loss of both cultural identity and the specific local character of the natural world – embodied by the invading alien species of tree such as the wattle. *The Heart of Redness* therefore depicts the preservation of regional cultural identities as a necessity if local cultures are to protect themselves from larger globalising cultural forces and suggests that a clear sense of local cultural allegiance should override the kind of amorphous hybridity that is represented by the expanding and economically monopolising forces of Western culture (189).

In "Os processos da globalização", Sousa Santos argues that local communities have not simply reacted passively, but have developed diversified strategies to resist the advances of globalization:

> Os poderes e envolventes processos de difusão e imposição de culturas, imperialisticamente definidos como universais, têm sido confrontados, em todo o sistema mundial, por múltiplos e engenhosos processos de resistência, identificação e indigenização culturais (54).

"Cosmopolitismo", one of the resistance processes Sousa Santos identifies appears to share some of the aspects stressed by Camagu's project:

> organização transnacional da resistência de Estados-nação, regiões, classes ou grupos sociais vitimizados pelas trocas desiguais de que se alimentam os localismos globalizados e os globalismos localizados, usando em seu benefício as possibilidades de interacção transnacional criadas pelo sistema

> mundial em transição, incluindo as que decorrem da revolução nas tecnologias de informação e de comunicação. A resistência consiste em transformar trocas desiguais em trocas de autoridade partilhada, e traduz-se em lutas contra a exclusão, a inclusão subalterna, a dependência, a desintegração, a despromoção (72-73).

Like the type of development proposed by Camagu, "cosmopolitismo" does not utterly reject globalization but tries to negotiate with it the establishment of local projects that can empower the local population and protect it from the most aggressive forms of globalization:

> a resistência mais eficaz contra a globalização reside na promoção das economias locais e comunitárias, economias de pequena-escala, diversificadas, auto-sustentáveis, ligadas a forças exteriores, mas não dependentes delas. Segundo esta concepção, numa economia e numa cultura cada vez mais desterritorializadas, a resposta contra os seus malefícios não pode deixar de ser a reterritorialização, a redescoberta do sentido do lugar e da comunidade, o que implica a redescoberta ou a invenção de actividades produtivas de proximidade (77).

In spite of the efforts displayed by scattered resistance movements at local level, the risk of being allured and overcome by major economic interests is always present, as Mda suggests at the end of the novel. Even though Camagu feels proud of the type of sustainable development the community has devised for Qolorha, he is well aware the village is not completely safe from the threat posed by greed:

> He feels fortunate that he lives in Qolorha. Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day here. At least for now. But for how long? The whole country is ruled by greed. Sooner or later the powers that be may decide, in the name of the people, that it is good for the people to have a gambling complex at Qolorha-by-Sea. And the gambling complex shall become into being (277).

As Vital points out, the complexity and duality commonly associated with a form of postcolonial identity can also be applied to the question of ecology in Mda's novel:

> In postcolonial situations it is perhaps inevitable that the indigenous as idea should appear two-sided, carrying as it does the burden of a colonising perspective while at the same time serving as a point from which to resist colonisation. The novel suggests for ecology a related duality. For if ecology mediates a traditional sense of connection with the land for a local community in danger of losing that connection, then it does so as an aspect of the modern, a tendency within the modern that seeks to preserve for its own reasons what is perceived as an "other", endangered by modernity as a whole (307).

In contemporary South Africa, the preservation of Qolorha's natural resources as defended by the Believers, especially by Qukezwa, depends on the possibilities opened up by globalization. The raison d'être of Camagu's ecotourist project is intrinsically tied to the economic and psychological well-being of both the local community and its potential tourists.[13] Having acquired valuable knowledge about economic development in the United States, Camagu is well aware that in contemporary South Africa, even in a remote village like Qolorha, the return to a kind of pre-colonial past (in its cultural, social, political, economic and even natural dimensions) as idealized

[13] According to Helen Gilbert, who develops the argument that contemporary Western ecotourism replays certain aspects of European imperialism in "Belated Journeys: Ecotourism as a Style of Travel Performance", the current expansion of the phenomenon of ecotourism taking place mainly in developing countries that were former colonies, despite offering both providers and consumers a wide range of economic and cultural benefits, calls for a critical analysis, especially of the relationships established with past and present modes of imperialism, i.e. colonialism and globalization: "Overall, despite its relative sophistication as a mode of engagement with Otherness, what is missing in the current ecotourism style is an awareness of its own historicity, its points of complicity in the ongoing exploitation of non-Western regions. (…) ecotourism cannot be thought of separately from the various forms of imperialism, past and present, operative in those spaces symbolically set aside for the enjoyment of a select Western clientele" (270).

by the Believers is no longer viable. However, he also rejects the kind of neo-liberal development supported by the Unbelievers. Through his small-scale ecotourist project he transcends the binaries of tradition and modernity, of local and global interests, as he takes advantage of globalized processes already under way in order to benefit the local community.[14] Kissack and Titlestad claim that Camagu's ecotourist project also has the potential of helping the inhabitants of Qolorha redefine their identities in the challenging context of post-apartheid:

> For Camagu, and the project of ecological tourism, the past is to be remembered, not ossified and revered, while the present must be redefined and reinvented to provide people with the dignity of self-determination, forged within the confines and prospects of their present situation. The vision of ecological tourism can provide this, as it offers the people of Qolorha-by-Sea respectful and conservatory control over their own environment, enables them and others to reflect on the passage of history, with all of its turmoil, conflict and tragedy, through which the region and its inhabitants have passed, and permits them some independence in the construction of a new identity in a time of social transformation (163).

Mda's portrayal of Camagu's ecotourist project entails a contemporary understanding of ecology, which Vital describes as "asserting the need for a 'people-centred' interest in the environment while being alert to both South Africa's colonial legacies and its peripheral position within a globalised economy" (298). In *The Heart of Redness* ecology becomes associated in a clear, yet somehow

[14] James Graham, however, argues in *Land and Nationalism in Fictions from Southern Africa* that Mda's proposals for development presented in the novel do not fully succeed in overcoming these binaries, perpetuating dependency from the outside: "Mda clearly wants to model recognisably *viable* alternatives to the government's top-down development scheme. His problem is that, in the bid for a tricksy narrative able to transcend the polarised narratives of the 'middle generations', to satirise Red ('traditional') and School ('modern') identities on what remains a deadly serious issue, the novel becomes mired in its own ironies (…) the fiction reproduces the ongoing dependency of the peoples of the Eastern Cape to 'outsider' intervention while simultaneously trying to construct a path out of that dependency" (166-167, italics in the original).

contradictory manner, with both the global and the local, given that it originated with and depends on global forces, while allowing local positions to defend their interests against the pressures of globalization:

> In the contemporary world, ecology can still be seen as deeply implicated in the bureaucracies of the land-owning classes, in the ideologies protecting the material comforts which modernity is spreading with great unevenness across the planet. Yet, at the same time, ecology can serve as a rallying point for local resistance to the encroaching forces of global capital. Postcolonial understandings of ecology in this way exist in the spaces defined by wariness towards the power, both economic and cultural, that flows from metropolitan centres, subverting what is perceived as damaging while engaging with what can be strategically useful in defence (Vital, 299).[15]

Another sensitive issue that divides Dalton and Camagu arises from the way they conceive the history, memory and culture of the amaXhosa. For Dalton, the most appropriate form for preserving amaXhosa culture is by displaying it in a cultural village, where amaXhosa traditions are re-enacted. Camagu tries to argue that Dalton's cultural village is a dishonest way of presenting amaXhosa

[15] Despite the uncontested potential of ecotourism projects for the economic development of former colonized nations, Gilbert calls attention to the risk of replicating colonial representations, especially in contemporary descriptions of those areas as pristine and unexplored, thus open to external exploitation: "That remote wilderness sites in 'exotic' non-Western regions have rapidly emerged as preferred destinations for Western ecotourists suggests that 'third-world' countries may offer particular historical as well as geo-social contexts in and through which the tensions between pre- and post-industrial travel modalities can be mediated. European imperialism, despite its diverse and sometimes conflicting projects, played an important role in this process of mediation in so far as it produced as truth ideologically-loaded views of specific (colonizable) regions of the earth as underdeveloped, pre-modern, and even pristine spaces that potentially offered bourgeois travelers a corrective to the stresses wrought by imperial modernity. Most ecotourism marketing materials, as well as a large number of policy documents, maintain this discursive construction of many former colonies (and their inhabitants) as always already marked by a sense of belatedness (…)" (263).

culture, because it exhibits it as fossilized and unrelated to the way the amaXhosa live nowadays:

> "I am just saying I have a problem with your plans. It is an attempt to preserve folk ways… to reinvent culture. When you excavate a buried precolonial identity of these people… a precolonial authenticity that is lost… are you suggesting that they currently have no culture… that they live in a cultural vacuum?" (248).

Kissack and Titlestad insist that Dalton's project is based upon and conveys a distorted image of the notion of "cultural":

> Dalton's concept of cultural tourism and a cultural village presents a focus on the past that panders to commercial interests, fosters stereotypes and impedes a critical engagement with the passage of time, subjecting a particular moment in the Xhosa people's history to an ossifying scrutiny and preservation that deprive them of any meaningful sense of historical evolution and transformational identity. It can be argued that the epithet "cultural" in Dalton's reference to his concept of tourism and the traditional village is in fact a misnomer, for what he is invoking is the rather two-dimensional notion of "custom", with its connotations of how a particular people used to live, dress and conduct their recreational activities and referring to vestiges of a way of life that has long since been eclipsed because the social, political and economic context and realities that gave them value and substance have been completely superseded by the dynamics of history (162-163).

Once again, on the issue of culture, more specifically concerning the display of African culture in cultural villages as a tourist attraction, Camagu's position coincides with that stated by Mda:

> It is clear that in *The Heart of Redness* I am saying that the past is always a strong presence in our present. Indeed our very identity is shaped by memory! However I do not advocate going back to that past. That is why I ridicule the whole notion of cultural villages that are big tourist attractions in South Africa. They purport to portray the culture of the African peoples of South Africa but in fact misrepresent that culture as a museum

> piece, as if it has been static since the pre-colonial times. These villages profess to show African culture… how Africans live… whereas in fact no African in South Africa lives like that today (Wark).

Camagu tries to explain to Dalton there is an alternative way of looking at a people's culture, not as connected to a past that does not exist as such anymore, but as a dynamic element of that people's present life: "I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic." (248). Camagu somehow manages to transfer his views on African culture as varied, complex and dynamic to the ecotourism concept he devises, by trying to get the local population to become engaged with the development of Qolorha. Direct involvement at various levels with the issues of development and modernity is underscored by Gyekye as fundamental for making sense of contemporary cultural experiences:

> African modernity can creatively be forged from the furnace of the African cultural experience, an experience that, as noted earlier, is many-sided, having sprung from the encounters with alien cultures and religions and from problems internal to the practice of the indigenous cultural ideas and values themselves. The African cultural experience is not demeaned by being many-sided, even though many-sidedness generates and compounds problems of cultural identity, just as it complicates the task of making a definite cultural sense of the total. But making such a cultural sense depends on the ingenuity of the practitioners of the culture. The creation of modernity out of the cultural experience of a people will ensure that the institutions that are fashioned and the values that are established are those to which the people will have emotional, ideological, and intellectual, attachments. Modernity emerging in this way will not only endure but have real meaning for the people and shape their lives in a more positive direction (280-281).

The declaration of Qolorha as a national heritage site seemingly relates to the role the village assumes in the novel as a source of multiple natural and cultural meanings, as Dannenberg argues:

> Underlying the novel's complex and multi-levelled narrative, the local natural environment of the village of Qolorha-by-Sea itself provides a unifying and positive force and constitutes the novel's most powerful statement about the necessity of protecting local environments from the invasion of Western economic forces (…) (171).

In the context of contemporary South Africa, heritage has become not only a much-debated subject, due to its emphasis on historical and cultural memory, but also a flourishing activity, given its economic potential as part of the heritage tourism industry. Both the cultural and the economic potential associated with heritage are stressed by Sabine Marschall in "Zulu Heritage between Institutionalized Commemoration and Tourist Attraction":

> Heritage not only can lead to the manufacture of a suitable past, it also can become a veritable industry (…) As official statements and press reports insist, virtually all new monuments and heritage sites are bound to attract hordes of 'cultural tourists', thereby becoming catalysts for infrastructure development, employment creation, and poverty alleviation to the benefit of previously disadvantaged communities. Hence, one might suspect that the design of any new commemorative object is at least as much guided by perceptions of what is visually appealing to tourists as by what is meaningful to the local communities (255).

Like ecotourism, along with the obvious economic advantages, heritage tourism may also bring cultural benefits to the local populations: "Apart from narrowly defined economic gains, communities may also begin to recognize the benefits in political and social terms of seeing 'their' heritage represented and officially endorsed" (Marschall, 260). However, as with ecotourism, heritage

tourism carries with it the risk of transforming African culture and history into a type of commodity that can re-enact the conception of an unspoilt geographical and cultural territory, not just among Western tourists, but among local African populations as well, as Gaylard puts it:

> histories and cultures [are] often commodified for consumption by metropolitan markets via their apparent authenticity. This commodification suggests both voyeurism on the part of cultural producers and their markets, and that this voyeurism is fuelled by nostalgia for a putatively lost authenticity (…) (22-23).

Even though they have different perspectives on the best developmental alternative for Qolorha, it is thanks to John Dalton that the village is rescued from the tourist project. According to Gohrisch, by securing governmental protection of Qolorha as a national heritage site (as suggested but never put in practice by Camagu), Dalton is trying to find atonement for the crimes committed in the past by his white ancestors:

> Thus the former colonizer finally saves the black community by preventing the sell-out to developers and Unbelievers who want to convert the place into a privately owned holiday resort. A new kind of shared history is envisaged here – one based on transcultural identity, rather than on division (243).

The John Dalton of the contemporary narrative appears to have successfully integrated the Xhosa community of Qolorha, seemingly overcoming whatever suspicion that might still arise towards him because of his British origins. For most Xhosa villagers, Dalton is regarded as one of them, as Zim emphasizes when Bhonco derogatorily refers to him as "the white man Dalton":

> "Dalton is not really white," says Zim in the trader's defense. "It is just an aberration of his skin. He is more of an umXhosa than most of us. He was circumcised like all amaXhosa men. He speaks isiXhosa better than most of you here" (147).

In spite of appearing a successful example of transcultural identity in post-apartheid South Africa, Dalton is one of the many characters in the contemporary narrative who are haunted to various degrees by feelings of shame and guilt. During an intense argument between Zim and Bhonco over the questions that divide Believers and Unbelievers, Dalton's ingenuous reference to the elders' ancestors in an attempt to appease them turns against him as it reawakens repressed feelings of resentment held against the British colonizers, which leads in turn to a strong sensation of shame regarding the behaviour of his own ancestors:

> Another battle is about to erupt, but Camagu and Dalton put a lid on it. Dalton makes the mistake of saying that their ancestors must be ashamed of them for the way they behave. Both elders give him a stern look.
> "Leave our ancestors out of this", says Zim. "What do you know of them?"
> "He knows them all right," says another elder. "His forebears cooked them in their cauldrons."
> "Yes," rejoins Bhonco. "This Dalton here… he is a descendant of headhunters. Yet no one holds that against him."
> "It is not true! It is not true!" shouts Dalton, flushed with shame (167-168).

The ignominious incident revived by the Xhosa elders, described earlier by Mda in the historical narrative, and which involved Dalton, Bhonco and Zim's ancestors during the Great War of Mlanjeni, one of the many frontier wars fought in the nineteenth century between the Xhosa and the British, becomes a strong image in the novel as it inverts and questions prevalent views associated with savagery and civilization in Western discourse. The picture of the British soldiers

cutting off and boiling the head of Xikixa, Twin and Twin-Twin's father, under the command of an earlier John Dalton, subverts the concept of a superior civilization, deployed by European colonizing nations as the main argument to sustain the authority of their imperial power. According to Sewlall, this episode also functions as "a sardonic commentary on the nineteenth-century obsession with the science of phrenology which sought to determine mental and other characteristics from the size of the cranium" ("Deconstructing", 10). Xikixa's descendants (mis)interpret the British soldiers' activities as being part of a cannibalistic ritual, but John Dalton calmly replies in their defense: "We are civilized men, we don't eat people" (…) "These heads are either going to be souvenirs, or will be used for scientific inquiry" (20). Disguised as evidence of the superior advancement of the European colonizers, the scientific study of the African peoples employed the anatomical differences observed to legitimize the colonization of African territories and its inhabitants. In *Quiet As It's Kept*, J. Brooks Bouson relates the attempt to subject peoples via the discourse of shame associated with such putatively scientific studies:

> A theory that codified the shaming of blacks and white contempt for the "lower" races, the study of racial differences functioned to give so-called scientific confirmation of the superiority (pride) of the higher and civilized white race and the inferiority (shame) of the lower and degenerate black race (Bouson, 140).

The discussion that ensues from the recollection of the disgraceful past episode becomes an exceptional instance in the novel for its ability to establish a polarised division among the people involved in it according to the old categories of colonized and colonizer, and thus uniting the feuding Believers and Unbelievers in their criticism of the attitudes displayed by the former colonizers. Even Camagu, who attempts to act as a mediator between conflicting positions at several moments throughout the contemporary narrative, is explicit in his

condemnation of the disrespectful acts committed by the European colonizers against the colonized peoples:

> The heads of our ancestors are all over Europe… trophies collected in military action and in executions", continues Camagu. "Not only heads. In Paris the private parts of a Khoikhoi woman called Saartjie Baartman are kept in a bottle! (168).

Camagu's reference to Saartjie Baartman, considered one of the most infamous cases associated with the nineteenth century obsession with non-European bodies, emphasizes not just condemnation of the colonizers' conduct, but very importantly, the difficulty for both former colonized and colonizers in dealing with the complex feelings of embarrassment and culpability that the case still arouses in contemporary times.[16] Baartman was a woman of Khoisan origin who

[16] It is important to stress here that even though in the contemporary narrative we find a firm condemnation of the European colonizers' misconduct towards the colonized peoples, in the historical narrative Mda takes a cautious approach to the depiction of the early colonial encounters between the Xhosa and the British in the nineteenth century. Highlighting the complex historical and cultural contexts surrounding the encounters, Mda illustrates how many of the violent conflicts that opposed European and African peoples during the early stages of colonization resulted from regrettable misunderstandings bred by ignorance of the Other's cultural values:

> Twin and Twin-Twin – accompanied by a small band of guerilla fighters – chanced upon a British camp hidden in a gorge. A small group of British soldiers were cutting off the ears of a dead umXhosa soldier.
> "What are they doing that for? Are they wizards?" asked Twin-Twin. "Or is it their way of removing *iqungu*?"
> Iqungu was the vengeful force generated by war medicines. A soldier who died in war could have his iqungu attack the slayer, bloating and swelling up his body until he died. The amaXhosa believed that the British soldiers had their own iqungu. Therefore, they mutilated the bodies of slain British soldiers to render their iqungu powerless. This was considered savagery of the worst kind by the British, whenever they came across their dead comrades with ripped stomachs on the Amathole slopes (19).

By describing acts of savagery committed by both the British and the Xhosa during the armed conflicts that opposed them, Mda contributes to the questioning and relativization of the notions of savagery and civilization, which activates the reasoning suggested by Sewlall: "If one savage act initiates another, the question is, who is the savage and who is the civilized?" ("Deconstructing", 9).

became known across Europe by the derogatory designation of the "Hottentot Venus". In 1810, a British doctor who came across her in Cape Town became fascinated by her steatopygia (a high degree of fat accumulation around the buttocks, sometimes accompanied by a formation called elongated labia, both of which are genetic characteristics of Khoisan women), and allegedly convinced her to travel to Europe, with the prospect that she would become rich and famous displaying her body. Between 1810 and 1815 she was subject to degrading public and private showings in London and Paris, where she was exhibited as a sexual freak and living evidence of the inferiority of the black race. After her death in Paris, in 1815, her humiliation continued, for her skeleton, preserved genitals and brain were placed on display at the *Musée de l'Homme* until as recently as 1974, when they were finally removed from public view and stored out of sight. As Zoë Wicomb argues in "Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa", the case of Saartjie Baartman testifies to the connection between the dehumanization of the non-European body, especially the female one, by the European colonizers, and the feelings of shame so commonly found among non-European peoples:

> Saartjie Baartman, whose very name indicates her cultural hybridity, exemplifies the body as site of shame, a body bound up with the politics of location. (…) The Baartman case also neatly exemplifies some of the central concerns of postmodern thought – the inscription of power in scopic relations; the construction of woman as racialized and sexualized other; the colonization and violation of the body; the role of scientific discourse in bolstering both the modernist and the colonial projects (93).

In 1994, the recently elected South African President Nelson Mandela formally solicited the French authorities to return Baartman's remains to her home country, a request that was only granted in 2002. This

contemporary episode of the Baartman case appears to suggest that the issues of shame and guilt still linger in the minds of both former colonized and colonizers. The reluctance demonstrated by the French authorities to release Baartman's remains has been interpreted by various observers as resulting from a combination of the remorse felt by Europeans in relation to the inhumane treatment Baartman and other non-European people were subjected to and the unwillingness to publicly admit it (see Chris McGreal "Coming home: Remains of 'Hottentot Venus' finally returned to her homeland").

In *The Heart of Redness* Mda draws readers' attention to how atrocities committed by their ancestors against African peoples of South Africa in colonial times, and those they may have been directly or indirectly complicit with during the period of apartheid, originate unsettling feelings of shame and guilt among the descendants of British colonizers in the post-apartheid era:

> The sufferings of the Middle Generation are only whispered. It is because of the insistence: *Forget the past. Don't only forgive it. Forget it as well. The past did not happen. You only dreamt it. It is a figment of your rich collective imagination. It did not happen. Banish your memory. There is virtue in amnesia. The past. It did not happen. It did not happen. It did not happen*.
> John Dalton's friends think that memory is being used to torment them for the sins of their fathers. Sins committed in good faith.
> Next week two of them are leaving, one for Australia and the other for New Zealand (137, italics in the original).

Whether unable or unwilling to deal with their guilty consciences, most of Dalton's friends of British descent decide to leave the country, claiming that even though they did not support the apartheid regime, they have nevertheless become disillusioned with the new social, political and economic directions post-apartheid South Africa is taking. Dalton becomes manifestly distressed over his friends' condescending attitudes towards Afrikaners and black South Africans

alike. To their shock, Dalton accuses them of being racist and supportive of the apartheid regime, under a liberal guise, comparing their decision to abandon South Africa for mostly white, English-speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand to the homeland mentality pursued by the Afrikaners:

> "That is the problem. You call the Afrikaner racist when he wants a homeland for his own people. You laugh at his pie-in-the-sky Orania homeland as a joke – which it is – but you are not aware that yourselves have a homeland mentality. Your homelands are in Australia and New Zealand. That is why you emigrate in droves to those countries where you can spend a blissful life without blacks… with people of your culture and your language… just like the Orania Afrikaners. Whenever there is any problem in this country you threaten to leave. You are only here for what you can get out of this country. You think you can hold us all to ransom." (…)
> "Yes, you prided yourselves as liberals," admits Dalton. "But now you can't face the reality of a black-dominated government. It is clear that while you were shouting against the injustices of the system, secretly you thanked God for the National Party which introduced and preserved that very system for forty-six years" (140).

Analysing the importance of the stories told at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the process of healing in post-apartheid South Africa in "Truth, Memory, and Narrative", Njabulo Ndebele critically scrutinizes the conduct of English-speaking liberal South Africans and argues that even though they may not have been as actively involved in the apartheid regime as the Afrikaners, they share a similar sense of guilt for their condescending attitudes:

> At the risk of setting up simplistic binary oppositions, one should state that, on balance, the guilt of English-speaking South Africans is as extensive as that of the Afrikaners. The latter were the primary agents. They had the power. They accumulated new wealth. They ruled with a firm hand. Their resulting self-

> confidence rendered them collectively insensitive. On the other hand, the guilt of the English-speaking South African was prone to greater moral agony, to more wrenching agonies of conscience. Those who had no power remained with their consciences, while those who had it died from within.
> We cannot afford to condone any aspect of racism at a time when racism should be permanently buried (27).

For Ndebele, during the apartheid regime the majority of English-speaking South Africans cautiously assumed what they believed to be a kind of neutral position between the white Afrikaner agents and the black African objects of their hegemonic agendas, which allowed English-speakers to safeguard their interests:

> Yes, they have a story to tell. Its setting is in the interstice between power and indifferent or supportive agency. In that interstice, the English-speaking South African has conducted the business of his life. Now he was indignant and guilty; now he was thriving. This no-man's land ensured a fundamental lack of character. With a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong – now they don't. When will they tell this story? (26).

Even though from the two passages cited it may look as if Ndebele is singling out and accusing a particular group of people, at bottom he is stressing the need in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa for those involved in the apartheid system – to a greater or lesser degree, directly or indirectly, whether consciously or unconsciously, either as agents, observers or victims - to tell the stories of their participation in that political regime. The demise of apartheid created a unique opportunity for present and future change, which implied the complex task of coming to terms with the country's troubled past. A crucial focus for this endeavour of reconciling the past with the present in order to build a new future was provided by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1995, as

a space for victims of apartheid to be heard finally, as well as for perpetrators to admit their crimes and procure forgiveness through confession and repentance, in an attempt to balance the need to denounce those complicit in the crimes of apartheid and the need for reconciliation. In spite of accusations of excessive leniency towards the offenders, the main purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that of achieving both testimony and forgiveness by giving voice to past narratives of pain that might lead to present narratives of forgiveness, seems to have been at least partly accomplished. In the Introduction to *Writing South Africa _ Literature, apartheid and democracy, 1970*-1995, Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge argue that this twin responsibility of exposure and acceptance at the heart of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and post-apartheid society as well, and which has constituted one of the greatest challenges of post-colonial literature in general, has become a crucial focus for post-apartheid literature:

> The need to tell the underside of apartheid history, and to outline its implications for the present and future, is matched by a desire in many instances to find a form of narration capable of acknowledging difference without fearing it and without fetishizing it (3).

The hearings at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were also instrumental in the process of validating the narratives that described the innumerable atrocities committed on every side of the political conflict, by promoting the passage from a state of repression to one of expression, carefully avoiding, however, an all too tempting, yet somewhat reductive black victim/white perpetrator dichotomy. The disclosure and confession of episodes of past violence during the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission inevitably enacted a tension between the desire for reparation and the desire

for knowledge, commonly found at the very heart of postcolonial and post-apartheid literatures, as Jolly and Attridge explain:

> On the one hand, there is the impulse to name and blame the perpetrators of colonial violence – even if it is the rhetorical violence of the cultural artifact that is at stake, and even if ambivalence is attributed to the colonizing discourse; on the other hand, there is a desire to develop, through an understanding of the other that does not reduce the other to the same, ethical modes of cross-cultural interchange (6-7).

In the two narrative strands he uses in *The Heart of Redness*, Mda not only unveils, but problematizes complex historical and contemporary questions in what seems to be an attempt also to reach a balance between exposure and understanding, revealing past and present circumstances of suffering and exploitation, yet avoiding simplistic binaries. Retrieving the past episode of Nongqawuse and its intricate historical context, and aligning it with the contemporary discussion surrounding issues of development, Mda successfully articulates the multiple and contradictory elements that constitute contemporary South African culture and society. Schatteman argues that when Qolorha is declared a national heritage site, thus preventing the construction of the planned casino, "Mda is able to reclaim Nongqawuse's significance as a symbol of resistance to land appropriation" (290). From a character responsible for one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of the Xhosa people, and consequently, a cause of great embarrassment for them, Nongqawuse is transformed in Mda's novel into a tourist attraction that contributes to the sustainable development of Qolorha:

> "Nongqawuse really sells the holiday camp", Camagu tells John Dalton, who is lying in a hospital bed. "When we advertise in all the important travel magazines we use her name. Qolorha is the place of miracles" (276).

Similarly, in Magona's *Mother to Mother*, Mandisa's recollection and reinterpretation of her grandfather's history lesson on Nongqawuse and the Cattle-Killing events attempts to reclaim the legitimacy of the young prophetess's voice:

> Tatomkhulu was a fund of facts that, although seemingly different, made a whole lot of sense of some of the things we learned at school. He explained what had seemed stupid decisions, and acts that had seemed indefensible became not only understandable but highly honourable (Magona, 183).

Though not entirely devoid of historical inaccuracies, which possibly result from the old man's imagination (see Schatteman, 278), the grandfather's version does not omit the dramatic results of the prophecies. Very importantly, his re-telling of the story, carefully stressing the context of great anxiety experienced by the Xhosa towards an unknown, threatening culture, makes the prophetess's behavior more understandable and even honorable. The recovery of Nongqawuse as a meaningful character for the history of the Xhosa, enacted by Mda and Magona in their works, emphasizes the importance of revising biased historical narratives that often served suspect and manipulative objectives, as Ashforth puts it:

> The context in which South African writing takes place is far from neutral. Since the 1950s, through the system of Bantu Education, a pernicious brew has been served to young black South Africans in the guise of history. The representations of the past embodied in Bantu Education, to say nothing of other official and semiofficial histories, were designed to buttress white domination and undoubtedly served to entrench ignorance. (…) The production of stories about the past, then, that can empower people in changing the structure of domination in their present is of the utmost importance in the struggle against apartheid (590).

If during the years of apartheid the production of narratives about the past was regarded as a powerful means to resist oppression, in the post-apartheid period the recovery of past (hi)stories relates mostly to the responsibilities brought by the new political situation of the country. In *Mother to Mother* and *The Heart of Redness,* Nongqawuse and the dramatic events of the nineteenth century Cattle-Killing episode are interwoven with the picture of a contemporary South Africa experiencing the difficulties of becoming a fully democratic nation, thus emphasizing the environment of enormous uncertainty that marked and marks the two historical periods:

> Given the extreme desperation that led the Xhosa to invest in the salvational promises of spiritual beliefs and partake in suicidal action, the traumatic events of 1856-7 offer a model of understanding where guilt and innocence do not need to be assigned and where right and wrong are not easily identified (Schatteman, 290).

It might be argued that in *The Heart of Redness* Mda deftly portrays the challenges posed to past and present South African society through a complex alignment between the two distinct narrative strands, and above all, by moving away from accusations and guilt, focusing instead on the need for development and understanding.

After the struggle against colonialism that led to its independence, and the long period of civil war that followed, it might be argued that contemporary Mozambique now faces challenges related to those of post-apartheid South Africa. In "As fronteiras da cultura", included in *Pensatempos*, Mia Couto describes this new period in the history of Mozambique as both frightening and stimulating:

> Este é um momento de abismo e desesperanças. Mas pode ser, ao mesmo tempo, um momento de crescimento. Confrontados com as nossas mais fundas fragilidades, cabe-nos criar um novo olhar, inventar outras falas, ensaiar outras escritas. Vamos

> ficando, cada vez mais, a sós com a nossa própria responsabilidade histórica de criar uma outra História (22).

As will be observed in the next chapter, in *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, Mia Couto also utilizes counterpointed narratives from past and present (hi)stories to suggest the multiple, at times even contradictory, but nonetheless enriching social, historical and cultural territories of Mozambique. This cross-referencing between past and present in the two novels, although carried out in more complex fashion by Mia Couto, bears witness to a realization that both historical novels and contemporary stories are incomplete in themselves as responses to the desire to investigate the state of southern African nations as they attempt to rebuild themselves after severe distorting processes.

Chapter 4

Mia Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia*

Michel Laban describes both Mia Couto's life and works in terms of a "jogo do reverso" (1002) when interviewing the writer for his collection of interviews *Moçambique- Encontro com Escritores*. This duplicity, or "duplo aspecto de uma única aparência" (Laban, 1002), which may appear contradictory at first sight, can be found in the writer's literary personality, as well as in his works. Accordingly, with respect to his identity, Mia Couto has never denied either his European or his African roots: "Então eu cresci nesta dualidade de casa e rua: a casa que me dava um suporte cultural europeu, um fundamento para o pensamento e para o sentimento de origem europeia, portuguesa; e a rua, que me trazia a outra parte, a parte africana do mundo" (Laban, 1007). Accepting this plurality made him more self-conscious about how identity is not a given but constantly contested by varying constituencies. Perhaps just as significantly, it helped him recognize the great diversity of Mozambican culture: "Por um lado deu-lhe um sentimento de si individual, por outro impeliu-o a construir-se colectivamente" (Cavacas, 113).

In *A Postmodern Nationalist*, dealing with the works of Mia Couto, Phillip Rothwell sums up the apparent contradictions surrounding the writer's literary personality:

> Now the most famous contemporary Mozambican writer, whose work has been translated into eight European languages, he has become the representative of an incipient African national culture for a predominantly Western audience (...) He is a white writer in a black space. His cultural heritage is unquestionably that of the former colonial power; the ghosts of Portugal's great writers

> haunt his literary education. Furthermore, his potential readership and thus his intended audience are predominantly external to Mozambique (17).

As Mia Couto explains, however, like every human being he is neither simple nor contradictory, but complex and multiple:

> É uma das grandes armadilhas do pensamento racionalista onde nós fomos educados: esta ideia de fazer acreditar que a identidade provém desta unidade, e a unidade é a ausência de confiltos, ausência de contrários – o que faz com que nos recusemos plurais (Laban, 1002)

Unsurprisingly therefore, the nature of identity or identities is at the centre of each of Couto's work, and certainly one of his latest novels, *O Outro Pé da Sereia*. At the launch of the book in Lisbon in May 2006, the author characterised it as "um cruzamento de viagens entre tempos e lugares em busca de miragens, em que a trama é o pretexto para pensar as grandes encruzilhadas, que não são as políticas ou económicas, mas as da identidade" (Centro Virtual Camões). However, in important linguistic, narrative and thematic details, *O Outro Pé da Sereia* diverges from previous works, thus becoming, if not a turning point, at least a relevant shift, not only in terms of Couto's literary production, but in the wider context of Mozambican literature. Linguistic recreation, one of the most commonly recognized (and recognizable) features in the works of Mia Couto, though not totally absent from the novel, is not resorted to as consistently as in earlier work as an intentional literary practice. Admitting an eventual influence of context over text, Luís Madureira argues in "Nation, Identity and Loss of Footing: Mia Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia* and the Question of Lusophone Postcolonialism" that the linguistic and thematic changes noticeable in Couto's novel may have been influenced by the country's socio-political situation, which has

moved from a Marxist republic to that of a capitalist democracy, with an extended period of civil war in between. If during the post-independence period Mozambique was trying to assert a recognizable nationality, adopting the former colonial language and yet adapting it according to local usages was a centrally important means of stressing the new nation's "moçambicanidade". In the current stage of democratic consolidation and globalization, Couto pursues the discussion of the complex issues related to contemporary identities, resorting nonetheless to a more thorough and critical tone. The change of tone in Mia Couto's novel might somehow also be connected to the issue of the implied readership and the balance most postcolonial writers need to achieve between their wish to address controversial or more local issues and the pressure to select linguistic, thematic and narrative features that will please their reading public, which is found mainly in Western countries. Scrutinizing the many similarities between the personal and literary trajectories of Mozambican Mia Couto and Angolan José Eduardo Agualusa in "Indianos e o Índico: o pós-colonialismo transoceânico e internacional em *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, de Mia Couto", David Brookshaw wonders whether both have become important references in Lusophone postcolonial literature because, unlike more obscure contemporary Lusophone postcolonial writers who deal with more local issues, they deliberately address their reading public (located mostly in Portugal and Brazil) through selecting a particular language and specific topics:

> Existem algumas receitas temáticas, certas maneiras de utilizar a língua, que os escritores aplicam para ganhar público leitor que não se reduza aos investigadores da literatura Africana lusófona? Será o tema lato das identidades e da relação entre verdade e ficção nas obras de Mia Couto e Agualusa o que interessa ao público português e, adicionalmente, aos leitores europeus? E mais concretamente, será que uma representação internacional

> da formação dos seus países, ao atravessarem as fronteiras para o Oriente, em direcção à Índia, e para o Ocidente, em direcção ao Brasil, os torna também internacionalmente mais populares? (138-139).

The greatest innovation of *O Outro Pé da Sereia* might be, however, the introduction of a historical narrative into the novel. Unlike Angolan literature, which demonstrates a distinguished production of historical narratives (including *A Gloriosa Família* by Pepetela and *Nação Crioula* by José Eduardo Agualusa), some of which go back to the period of the early contacts between Africans and Europeans in the country as a means of constructing a more thorough understanding of contemporary Angola, Mozambican literature has principally focused on more recent events. For Brookshaw, the rehabilitation of important historical events from the early stage of colonization in Mozambique and its deft connection with contemporary times in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* can be seen as Couto's "tentativa mais óbvia de retratar o mundo crioulo gerado pelos portugueses" (133).

The novel unfolds thus in two alternate narratives that represent two crucial periods in the history of Mozambique. The opening narrative takes place in contemporary Mozambique, more precisely in 2002, ten years after the end of the devastating civil war that had begun in 1977, not long after the declaration of independence. This narrative follows Mwadia Malunga as she returns to her hometown, *Vila Longe*, with the mission of looking for a sacred place to keep the statue of Our Lady, which she and her husband had accidentally found by the river, next to *Antigamente*, the village where they lived (my emphasis).[1] The second narrative, based on historical facts,

[1] The two toponyms appear to suggest an assumption of geographical and time features marked by exogenous references. As Madureira points out: "The questions immediately posed by the place names relate to reference and origin, that is, the location of the 'now' from whose vantage point Antigamente is designated a distant

describes the voyage undertaken by the Jesuit missionary D. Gonçalo da Silveira to the Empire of the Monomotapa in 1560:

> O propósito da viagem é realizar a primeira incursão católica na corte do Império do Monomotapa. Gonçalo da Silveira prometeu a Lisboa que baptizaria esse imperador negro cujos domínios se estendiam até ao Reino de Prestes João. Por fim, África inteira emergiria das trevas e os africanos caminhariam iluminados pela luz cristã (61).

Behind the religious interests zealously defended by D. Gonçalo da Silveira, there were also significant political and commercial interests that the Portuguese Crown aimed at consolidating with this mission into the Empire of the Monomotapa. Most descriptions of this first missionary voyage refer to it as part of a political and commercial strategy that aimed at expelling the Muslims, who controlled the commercial transactions in the region, and taking their place.[2] Quite often, descriptions of this historical enterprise present the different interests behind it as being intertwined. In *A History of Africa*, J.D. Fage refers to the mixed intentions behind the Portuguese missionary voyage: "The first serious attempt at this [attempt to control the trade in the Monomotapa territory] took the form of a Jesuit mission in 1560-61 under Gonçalo da Silveira, the aim being to convert the

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past, and of the 'center' in relation to which Vila Longe is determined to be remote or eccentric" (214).

[2] There is no formal referencing in the novel to the historical documents upon which Couto based the historical narrative, apart from the epigraphs found before the chapters of the historical narrative, which come from identified historical sources that refer to D.Gonçalo da Silveira (some attributed to the missionary himself). Even though based on historical events and characters, there is no claim to historical "truth" in the historical narrative, which constitutes an important setting in the novel for the dissolution of frontiers between apparent opposites, starting with that between reality and fiction. In one of the interviews given at the time the novel was published in Brazil, Couto clearly states that: "eu trato o facto verídico como se ele pudesse também ser da ordem do ficcional. A certa altura, ficamos sem saber o que é imaginário, o que é real. Uma das mais belas funções da escrita é o convite a transgredir fronteiras" (Entrevista*, Globo*).

king[3] and his court and so link them to Portuguese interest" (231).[4] In *Donas, Senhoras e Escravos*, however, José Capela points quite clearly to the commercial potential the territory of the Monomotapa represented for the Portuguese, as well as to the importance of the Portuguese who were already established in the region when D. Gonçalo arrived, two aspects that sustained the religious mission, but that as Couto's novel shows, will also determine its failure:

> Está dito e redito que os portugueses, no seu projecto inicial, nada mais queriam das costas orientais de África do que os pontos de apoio para a viagem da Índia. Uma vez em Sofala, o engodo pelas minas de ouro que lhes vinha do interior levou-os até ao Monomotapa. Aí chegados, o comércio concomitante à intromissão determinou algum tipo de estabelecimento no terreno. Para controlarem a saída do ouro pelo Zambeze em direcção ao porto de Angoche ocuparam posições fortificadas em Sena e Tete, centros a partir dos quais intentaram dominar o comércio desde Manica ao Monomotapa e Abutua. Em 1530, já havia pelo território adentro centenas de aventureiros portugueses no escambo do ouro por tecidos. Os ganhos subiam a três mil por cento. Para 1550 há notícia de portugueses fixados em plena Zambézia. Quando o padre Gonçalo da Silveira, em 1560, foi ao Monomotapa já por lá havia portugueses familiarizados com o meio e com entrada na corte (24-25).

[3] In the novel, the ruler of the Monomotapa territory is referred to as an "emperor", but in some history books, such as Fage's, he is described as a "king". With respect to the different designations, Malyn Newitt mentions in *A History of Mozambique* that "The Portuguese called the Monomotapa an 'emperor' and the other chiefs his kings or vassals. There is no evidence, however, that a large, centralized karanga state existed or that there was ever an 'empire' of Monomotapa" (40). Here, however, and regardless of a potential minor degree of historical accuracy, the designation used in the novel, that of "Emperor" will be maintained.

[4] According to Capela, D. Gonçalo adopted a strategy common among Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, that of selecting the rulers of the overseas territories as the first to convert to Christianity, thus securing the conversion of all the subjects: "Uma vez na corte do Monomotapa catequizou e, ao fim de pouco tempo, baptizou a família real e centenas de súbditos (…).É evidente como os jesuítas (…) tinham como método converter as chefias que levariam atrás de si os vassalos. Maneira expedita de reduzir à cristandade reinos inteiros" (164).

Aboard the ship sailing from Goa to Mozambique, besides the statue of Our Lady, which had been blessed by the Pope and is going to be offered to the Emperor of the Monomotapa, is travelling a heterogeneous group of passengers who represent a series of economic, religious and social agents involved in the early stage of colonialism, as can be seen in Brookshaw's description of the ship:

> No navio juntam-se elementos portugueses, africanos e indianos, constituintes do mundo moçambicano crioulo em formação. Além disso, a dupla função da embarcação enquanto navio de carga e navio negreiro sugere o sincronismo dos dois principais negócios dos portugueses: o tráfico de produtos orientais, particularmente especiarias, no Oceano Índico, e o tráfico de escravos para o Novo Mundo, no Oceano Atlântico (Brookshaw, 133).[5]

In the historical narrative, the ship *Nossa Senhora da Ajuda* becomes the setting for the enactment of complex cultural and identity conflicts, several of which resurface in the contemporary narrative. Tensions arise from the initial contacts between Europeans and non-Europeans and their differing perspectives on issues such as slavery and freedom, imposition and choice (of language, religion), but the novel does not develop a simple polarization between colonizers and colonized over the issues. In fact, in the historical narrative dissension occurs within the representatives of both the colonizers and the colonized themselves. While D.Gonçalo da Silveira remains loyal to his missionary project throughout the narrative, as he gets close to the African slaves on the ship priest Manuel Antunes is led to question not only his own faith, but the whole purpose of the religious

[5] The cultural diversity on board *Nossa Senhora da Ajuda* matches the image of the ship Gilroy presents in *The Black Atlantic*: "modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity" (12). Intimately connected with the Atlantic slave trade, the slave ship has become a recurrent motif in contemporary historical and postcolonial literature, taking central stage in works such as *Sacred Hunger* (1993) by Barry Unsworth, *Crossing the River* (1993) by Caryl Phillips, *Middle Passage* (1990) by Charles Johnson, and *Feeding the Ghosts* (1999) by Fred D'Aguiar (see Low, 104).

mission.[6] Through their conversations on board the ship, the African slave Nimi Nsundi and Dia Kumari, an Indian slave accompanying her Portuguese mistress, reveal opposite views on the question of how the identities of the colonized may be affected by the colonizers' imposed cultural, linguistic and religious values. Dia constantly confronts Nimi with his betrayal of his African identity. She accuses him of denying his origins by adopting the colonial language and religion. Apparently unable to verbalize his arguments before the Indian slave, Nimi decides to write a letter in which he explains that by using a language other than his native one or by adopting certain rituals from a new religion, he is not abandoning an original and static identity, but opening up to multiple perspectives, for identities are always already flexible: "A alma é um vento. Pode cobrir terra e mar. Mas não é da terra nem do mar" (131).

At the intersection of the two narratives, besides the statue of Our Lady, the presence of D. Gonçalo da Silveira and Mwadia (who brings past and present times together) is, above all, the picture of a country that, like its inhabitants, is still on a journey to find itself or its selves. In this journey in search of the various pieces that are part of the puzzle that constitutes Mozambican identities, the intertwining of events in contemporary Mozambique with events that took place in the sixteenth century states the centrality of this historical moment

[6] According to Newitt, "Silveira belonged to the heroic school of missionaries who were more concerned to take the Christian gospel to parts of the world where it had never yet been preached, even at the cost of martyrdom, than to set about the tedious and undramatic task of building up a mission that would achieve lasting results" (54-55). The murder of the Portuguese Jesuit missionary, which according to most historical records was commanded by the Emperor of the Monomotapa, became one of the most dramatic episodes of martyrdom in the history of Portuguese expansion. For The Portuguese, Silveira's martyrdom illustrated the savagery of African peoples, thus legitimating their civilizing mission and expansionist project in African territory. The episode is depicted in the lyrical epic *Os Lusíadas* by Luís Vaz de Camões in a stanza Couto reproduces in an epigraph preceding chapter nine in the historical narrative (see *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, 178).

for the country, corresponding to the early stage of Portuguese exploration (and exploitation) of its African colonies.

Many historians and sociologists have studied the different stages of Portuguese colonialism, focusing on specific historical and/or socio-cultural elements from differing perspectives. Some of the most innovative materials on the subject have been written by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a sociologist who looks at Portuguese colonization from a post-colonial perspective. In the essay "Entre Prospero e Caliban: Colonialismo, pós-colonialismo e inter-identidade", included in the work *Entre ser e estar: Raízes, Percursos e Discursos da Identidade*, examining the question of the identity of the Portuguese colonizers, he depicts it as an intermediate state, inherently unstable and not clearly defined: "Nem Prospero nem Caliban, restou-lhes a liminaridade e a fronteira, a inter-identidade como entidade originária" (54). According to Sousa Santos, Portugal was always in a semi-peripherical situation in relation to other European countries (especially in relation to Britain, which represented the apparent norm of European colonialism and on which Portugal had depended in certain historical circumstances). The indeterminacy of the Portuguese colonizers' identity accordingly influenced their relationship with the colonized peoples and became a specific characteristic of Portuguese colonialism: "A instabilidade, a imperfeição e a incompletude do Prospero português tornaram problemática a sua auto-identificação e esta condição arrastou o próprio Caliban" (Sousa Santos, 77). The effects of the indecisiveness of Portuguese colonialism on the identity processes of Mozambicans were further complicated by the long armed conflict that saw Mozambicans fight against each other almost immediately after the declaration of independence, thus preventing the formation of a stable country, as Patrick Chabal explains:

> Poorly integrated by the Portuguese during the colonial period, badly bruised by the nationalist struggle and torn asunder by civil war since independence, Mozambique is not yet a country in any meaningful sense of the word. Largely shorn of the social cultural attributes of the modern nation-state with which Africans could readily identify, Mozambique is itself part reality and part fiction. And as the reality is so often unpalatable, survival entails living firmly in one's individual fantasy world (*Lusophone Africa*, 79-80).

Like Mozambicans themselves, in Chabal's formulation, the characters in Mia Couto's works often resort to the world of fantasy in order to survive. As the epigraph to chapter four,[7] attributed to the intellectual barber of Vila Longe, entails, for Mozambicans, physical and mental survival implies forgetting the complicated past and creating a new reality in order to project a better future: "Eis a nossa sina: esquecer para ter passado, mentir para ter destino" (75). *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, like Mia Couto's previous works, articulates thus the indefinition of the country's identity. In the two historical moments depicted in the two main narratives of *O Outro Pé da Sereia* it is accordingly possible to observe characters who reveal some level of uncertainty about their own identities. This difficulty in defining one's identity, often associated with postcolonial contexts, might be regarded, according to philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah, as a consequence of the complex task of making sense of the various constructed elements that compose human identity, and not specifically postcolonial identities:

[7] The use of epigraphs before a short story or even a chapter is one of the traits of Mia Couto's works. Those epigraphs, marked by Couto's close attention to the delights and peculiarities of language, usually address the meaning(s) of the narrative to follow. In the novel *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, some epigraphs are quotations from other authors and/or sources that relate to the chapters. There are also aphoristic epigraphs, which are either Mozambican proverbs or thoughts attributed to the novel's characters. Strongly connected to traditional storytelling, the epigraphs have a didactic purpose and are used as a way of stimulating the readers' reflection (see Afonso, 276).

> Every human identity is constructed, historical; every one has its share of false presuppositions, of the errors and inaccuracies that courtesy calls "myth", religion, "heresy", and science "magic". Invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite manages to conform ("African Identities", 88).

In a novel where different voyages and times are juxtaposed, the contemporary narrative follows the journey of an African-American couple to Mozambique in search of their African origins. It will be the presence of these foreign characters that will raise important questions related to Mozambican identities among the inhabitants of Vila Longe. The introduction of this African-American couple is also a clear sign of Mia Couto's attention to the complicated networks of identification that exist in this area, given that there is currently a strong trend among successful African-Americans to trace and travel back to their African origins. It has recently become not just possible, but quite popular for wealthy African-Americans in the United States to have their African roots traced through genetic science. "African-American Lives", a television miniseries hosted and co-produced in 2006 by Henry Louis Gates Jr, chairman of the department of African and African-American Studies at Harvard, has undoubtedly contributed to the setting of that trend. In the first season, successful African-Americans such as media entrepreneur Oprah Winfrey, music producer Quincy Jones and actress Whoopi Goldberg had their roots traced all the way back to Africa via DNA analysis. Besides the many questions the television series has raised among genetic scientists, such as the limited reach of the technique and the consequent partiality of the results found, an important cultural, political and sociological debate has arisen as well on the issues of race, colour and identity. In his newspaper article in *The Guardian*, "New roots",

Gary Younge points to some of the controversial questions the series has inevitably stirred:

> But while these journeys into the past are essentially personal, they raise broader issues about racial authenticity and the genetic basis for racial categorisations. Furthermore, it addresses the fundamental issue of whether any of us can, ultimately, really say where we come from – and what use it would do us even if we could (1).

Besides the identity problematics Younge identifies (issues such as "what lies behind the need to know one's origins?" and "how is that knowledge going to affect who we are?"), and which are also at the core of Benjamin Southman's quest for his African roots in Couto's novel, one of the most upsetting aspects the series has disclosed is that as DNA results can trace only a small fraction of one's ancestry, results are often manipulated in order to correspond to the expectations of those who resort to them. In the case of the contemporary African-American public, which relies on these tests in order to trace their African origins alone, the European and Native-American ancestries (occurring in sizeable percentages among the majority of the African-American people) are neglected, while the African component is overemphasized. All these questions have led to extreme positions on the link between DNA testing and race: while in their defence scientists claim that the prevalence of multiple ancestries - a feature described by Casuarino in the contemporary narrative as the result of "mulatização global" (311) - revealed by DNA testing on contemporary subjects can work to reinforce the understanding that race is a mere social construction, sociologists such as Paul Gilroy have criticised this type of scientific work. In Gilroy's view it tends to stress race as a biological trait, disturbingly resonating with the racial categories of the 18th century, when instead the main objective should be to "demand liberation (...) from

all racializing and raciological thought, from racialized seeing, racialized thinking, and racialized thinking about thinking (*Against Race*, 40). Dwelling on the complex question of how to define contemporary African identities, Appiah also highlights the need to escape from limiting associations to race:

> In short, I think it is clear enough that a biologically-rooted conception of race is both dangerous in practice and misleading in theory: African unity, African identity, need securer foundations than race ("African Identities", 89).

The current appeal of making contact with Africa among African-Americans is explained by Eddy L. Harris in the first chapter of *Native Stranger – a Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa*,[8] a

[8] Eddy L. Harris uses the designation "Black American" in this work rather than "African-American". Even though the two expressions are apparently equivalent, the choice indicates a conscious positioning with respect to not only naming but the very results of Harris's ideological quest, since he does not consider himself African: "I am American. And I am black. I live and travel with two cultural passports, the one very much stamped with European culture and sensibilities and history. The other was issued from the uniquely black experience, which is like no other, born of slavery and hardship and tied to a land we might call home but that we blacks do not know, and most have never seen – Africa" (28). One influential writer who has been drawn closer to Africa is the once activist for the Civil Rights Movement and womanist (a term she herself coined to refer to the ordeals shared by women of colour) Alice Walker, who has often voiced her rejection of reductive Afrocentric-Eurocentric oppositions, commonly embraced by contemporary African-Americans. In *The Multicultural Imagination*, Michael Vannoy Adams investigates the complex interrelationship between race, colour and the unconscious, and resorts to Walker's views on humanism and universalism as a means of supporting his challenge to the limiting identification of individual identities with collective racial identity: "Walker acknowledges the ambiguities of an exclusively Afrocentric position, one that accepts uncritically all things African merely because they happen to be from Africa. She is not a cultural relativist but a universalist and a humanist. What ultimately interests her is not 'racial' values but 'transracial', universal, human values" (168). During the recent Presidential Elections in the United States Walker reaffirmed this universalist position when she endorsed Barack Obama as the best Democrat candidate. In the article "Lest We Forget: An open letter to my sisters who are brave" she explains that her choice is based on the candidate's human and political qualities, and not on the fact that he is male and black, as some white and black feminists (who, according to Walker, favoured candidate Hilary Clinton only because she was female) readily accused her of: "When I offered the word 'Womanism' many years ago, it was to give us a tool to use, as feminist women of colour, in times like these. (...) We are not white women, and this truth has been ground into us for centuries. But neither are we inclined to follow a black person, man or woman, unless they demonstrate considerable courage, intelligence,

chronicle that narrates his impressions as he travels through the continent:

> In the mind and perhaps dreams of every person with black skin, the specter of Africa looms like the shadow of a genie, dormant but not altogether harmless, always there, heard about since childhood as some magnificent faraway world, a place of magic and wonder. Africa as motherland. Africa as a source of black pride, a place of black dignity. Africa as explanation for the ways of black men and women, their way of walking and their passion, their joys and their sorrows. Africa as some germ in the genes that determines more than skin and hair (13-14).

In Couto's novel, Rosie and Benjamin Southman go to Vila Longe representing an American non-governmental organization that aims to reduce poverty in Africa, but their journey also has personal motives. Rosie is a sociologist who works in American prisons, mostly with black prisoners. Among other things, she studies their mental representations and once in Mozambique she wants to compare these with what she terms "the African imaginary". Although she is now an American citizen, she was born in Brazil. Benjamin, who was born and has always lived in the United States, proudly designates himself as African-American, but reveals some anxiety towards what he

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compassion and substance. We have come a long way, sisters, and we are up to the challenges of our time, one of which is to build alliances based not on race, ethnicity, colour, nationality, sexual preference or gender, but on truth" (2). Unsurprisingly, Obama's election has originated passionate debates on the issues of race, colour and ethnicity on a global scale, but particularly among intellectuals of African descent or living in Africa. Mia Couto also publicly states his viewpoint on Obama's victory in the article "E Se Obama Fosse Africano?", first published in the Mozambican newspaper *Savana* and included later in the collection of essays *Interinvenções*. Like Walker, he rejects the association of Obama's victory exclusively with race, emphasizing instead the sentiments it has raised globally, but with particular emphasis in African countries, many of which are still a long way from democracy: "A verdade é que Obama não é africano. A verdade é que os africanos – as pessoas simples e os trabalhadores anónimos – festejaram com toda a alma a vitória americana de Obama. Mas não creio que os ditadores e corruptos de África tenham o direito de se fazerem convidados para esta festa. Porque a alegria que milhões de africanos experimentaram no dia 5 de Novembro nascia de eles investirem em Obama exactamente o oposto daquilo que conheciam da sua experiência com os seus próprios dirigentes" (214).

assumes to be the African half of his identity. He studies the history of African slaves who were carried to the United States, but above all wishes to trace the origins of his personal history, which he believes he will find in Mozambique:

> África, a sua África, ia ganhando desenho, um contorno próximo e real. Por fim, ele chegava à terra de onde há séculos os seus antepassados tinham sido arrancados pela violência da escravatura. Era preciso esse regresso para que Benjamin Southman, historiador afro-americano, se reconstituísse, ele que se sentia como um rio a quem houvessem arrancado a outra margem (161).

The voyage back to one's cultural roots is frequently connected with the desire for a form of therapeutic cultural immersion in which not only will the outlines of one's own history become apparent, but one's very identity will stand revealed more clearly. Even Eddy L. Harris, who tries to retain a journalistic tone as much as possible, and who is therefore sceptical about the "back to Africa" myth, ends up formulating a similar wish:

> I had some eerie feeling Africa could teach me about life and what it means to be human, deepen my appreciation for all that I am and all that I have, help me to find, perhaps, the face of God, perhaps even my own face, help me to step out of my cozy little world, out of myself so that I could see myself better and better define myself (27).

In their conversations with the few inhabitants of Vila Longe, Rosie and Benjamin are faced with various facts and fictions related to Mozambican history and culture that confuse their related initial intentions. When Casuarino Malunga, Mwadia's uncle, who has become a successful businessman, learns that there is an African-American couple from an NGO interested in visiting Vila Longe, he arranges a meeting with the village's inhabitants to prepare their reception. During the foreigners' stay, the villagers plan to put on a

play in order to convince the Americans that Vila Longe is the perfect place for the NGO's funds to be allocated: "-Nós vamos contar uma história aos americanos. Vamos vender-lhes uma grande história" (154). The story will include passages of suffering related to slavery and colonialism, and it will also include a woman with special spiritual powers (a character to be played by Mwadia), who would make the connection between present and past times by contacting Benjamin's ancestors. These ingredients, carefully chosen by Casuarino, correspond to some of the most common representations associated with Africa, produced both inside and outside the African continent, deftly deconstructed here by Mia Couto. The plan set up by Casuarino was not, as the narrator ironically explains,[9] meant to deceive the African-Americans by presenting them with a distorted picture of Mozambican history and culture, but to please them by giving them exactly what they expected to find in Africa, so that Vila Longe, its inhabitants and their stories, would match the foreigners' preconceptions about Africa:

> Estava dada a incumbência: ao estudar os papéis de Benjamin Southman descobririam aquilo que ele aspirava encontrar em África. Depois, encenariam em Vila Longe a África com que o estrangeiro sempre havia sonhado. Mentir não passa de uma benevolência: revelar aquilo que os outros querem acreditar (175).

Mwadia's task of composing Benjamin Southman's history is ambivalent in its significance: on the one hand, the possibility of rewriting history in contemporary Africa starkly contrasts with the past of submission and preterition imposed by the long period of colonial domination. In the historical narrative, Manuel Antunes recalls a dramatic episode he witnessed during the voyage to

[9] In *O Outro Pé da Sereia* there is quite frequently no apparent distance between the voice of the characters and that of the narrator, which transforms the narratorial voice, or voices, into an extension of the different characters.

Mozambique, and which conveys not just metaphorically but quite literally the silencing and degradation colonized peoples were subject to:

> A mais cruel das memórias de Manuel Antunes era a de um escravo que, desesperado de fome, cortou a língua e a comeu. Mais do que uma recordação era um símbolo da condição da gente negra: exilada do passado, impedida de falar senão na língua dos outros, obrigada a escolher entre a sobrevivência imediata e a morte anunciada (302).

On the other hand, the manipulation of historical facts and the deliberate silencing of certain past events, such as the involvement of African peoples in the slave trade, underline the perpetuation of Africa's submission to Western countries, motivated in contemporary capitalist societies by economic interests and relabelled or rearranged as globalization. Madureira argues that in the context of postcolonial Mozambique, portrayed by Couto in the contemporary narrative,

> the tactical transformation of Vila Longe's historical past into the mirror of Southman's most ardent desires subscribes to the logic of the neoliberal capitalist dispensation that has thoroughly displaced Frelimo's revolutionary dreams. In accordance with this global economic logic, the counterfeit history the locals agree to fabricate becomes a commodity produced locally in response to Southman's "globalized" demand (216 -217).

Even though at first sight very little connects the remote Mozambican village of Vila Longe and sophisticated genetic laboratories in the United States, by manipulating historical data in order to give Benjamin Southman what he expects to discover about his African identity, the inhabitants of Vila Longe are echoing the manipulation of DNA test results in order to reveal only what the test's customers are interested in. For the inhabitants of Vila Longe, altering certain aspects of their History implies, however, more than the acceptance

of its commodification (for others' personal interests and their own economic advantage) or their wilful participation in the spread of misinformation. Deciding to forge their History, they eventually commit an offense against their own historical and cultural memory, as the narrator indicates when they meet for the first time in order to prepare the reception for the foreign visitors: "Os preparativos para a chegada dos estrangeiros foram concebidos como se um crime estivesse sendo congeminado. E de um crime, na realidade, se tratava" (148). The exchanges between the Mozambican villagers and the foreign visitors disclose globalized, postcolonial Mozambique as a site in which former simplistic oppositions between the colonized (regarded as mere "objects") and the colonizers (seen as "agents") have been replaced by a complex game of projected desires and interests on both sides that nonetheless assigns some kind of agency to the former, as Madureira explains: "The form of subaltern agency that Couto's account seeks to instantiate would thus have survived as the negated term in a dialectic of historical progress that has endured beyond the transition from colony to nation" (216). What this subaltern agency therefore seems to imply is that exploitation and misunderstandings between the African continent and Western countries are maintained in the postcolonial period, even though under new circumstances and a different designation, still marked by a reductive and patronising view of Africa by the West. As Ulrike Auga argues in "Cultural Politics in South Africa in Transition. Or, Multiculturalism and Economic Policy", in postcolonial nations the current notions of globalization and multiculturalism frequently replicate the type of subaltern attitudes instilled by colonialism:

> The multiculturalist treats every culture in the same way in which the colonizers treated the colonized, as indigenous people whom one studied. The relation between traditional imperialist colonization and worldwide capitalist globalization corresponds to

> the relation between cultural imperialism and multiculturalism. Global capitalism can colonise without occupying a territorial state. The multiculturalist seems to respect the identity of the other and seems to accept the others in an authentic community. But the multiculturalist is aware of the distance between this community and her/himself (222).

Under the pretense of being tolerant towards and respectful of other cultures, the way the Americans visiting Vila Longe come to terms with the village and its inhabitants in the twenty-first century does not differ much, however, from the patronizing attitudes displayed by previous generations of colonizers:

> Os americanos a tudo iam achando graça, tudo para eles era motivo de interesse antropológico. Benjamin limpou os olhos como se invisíveis poeiras atrapalhassem o foco da sua máquina fotográfica. Incessantemente, repetia:
> - Oh, Africa, tão interessante! (167)

The maintenance of an exotic portrayal of Africa by Westerners and Africans alike is an issue that concerns most contemporary African writers, including the acclaimed (and critical) Chinua Achebe. Interviewed by Jason Zsaky for *Failure* magazine about his 2000 book *Home and Exile*, in which he discusses the way Africa has been portrayed, not only in fictional, but also in journalistic and scientific texts, Achebe criticizes the fact that, to this day, most Westerners do not travel to Africa with an open mind, but with many preconceptions as to what they will find there:

> People go to Africa and confirm what they already have in their heads and so they fail to see what is there in front of them. This is what people have come to expect. It's not viewed as a serious continent. It's a place of strange, bizarre and illogical things, where people don't do what common sense demands (Zsaky).

Dwelling on recent feelings of uncertainty and anxiety over the social and aesthetic significance of postcolonial literature in *Native*

Intelligence, Deepika Bahri argues that the perception of postcolonial identities in the West is often based on erroneous presuppositions:

> The content of postcolonial identity is implicitly assumed to reside in the economic deprivation and disprivileging associated with Third Worldliness. The internal striation we find in the so-called South these days continues to be invisible in the persistently macroscopic view that defines postcoloniality in metropolitan discourse. In this view, there is little room for considering the complexities wrought by contemporary technologies and the new world order and the new alignments and coalitions that complicate the notion of bipolar or even tripolar power bases (50).

Conscious of the motivations and false assumptions behind Southman's visit to Vila Longe, Casuarino decides to turn the phenomenon of globalization, which is commonly viewed as working against the interests of developing countries, into financial profit, and into an excuse for the process of mutual exploitation the inhabitants of Vila Longe and the foreign visitors will become involved in: "Estes gostam [de pagar] porque sentem-se culpados, está perceber [sic]? Saíram daqui, deixaram a malta a sofrer com o colonialismo e, agora, regressam engravatados, cheios de inglesuras, e a gente ainda passando fome" (152). For Casuarino, Benjamin and Rosie are symbols of globalization. When they arrive in Vila Longe, he pompously announces to the village's population: "Isto é a globalização, my friends! A globalização mundial! Vila Longe é a capital da aldeia global" (168). There are other references in the novel, particularly in the contemporary narrative, to the phenomenon of globalization and the ways characters living in postcolonial Mozambique relate to it. Among those characters is Lázaro Vivo, a traditional healer who has found an ingenious manner to juggle traditional and modern elements in his professional activity. Free from the restraints that had forced him to seek refuge in the

mountains during the Revolutionary period, during which traditional African activities such as his were forbidden for being regarded as incompatible with the imported socialist ideals supported by Frelimo, in contemporary Mozambique the way Lázaro Vivo presents himself to the public reveals a remarkable blend of tradition and modernity: "Lázaro Vivo, notável das comunidades locais, curandeiro e elemento de contacto para ONGs" (28). Lázaro's self-description incorporates that which is seen as the biggest challenge faced by African postcolonial subjects, i.e. adapting to new circumstances prompted by modernity while trying to maintain important aspects of their African cultural identities:

> This juxtaposition of modernity with assertions of African ethnicity inserts us on the one hand in a problematic space symbolising the space inhabited by postcolonial Africans. The desire to be part of the global and modern world characterised by success and achievement, on the other hand is the attempt to assert a unique African cultural identity. (…) The postcolonial problematic is one of identification. The challenge is how to acknowledge one's colonised or globalised self while still asserting one's Africanness (Lunga, 114).

One of the most visible signs of Lázaro's surrender to the effects of globalization is the mobile phone he owns, and which he likes to boast of (so much that Casuarino has to warn him not to show it to Southman, so as not to ruin their constructed picture of African authenticity; see 314-315), even though he cannot use it: "Eu já estou no futuro. Quando chegar aqui a rede, já posso ser contactado para serviços internacionais. Entendem, meus amigos?" (30). Lázaro's attempts to adapt his traditional activity to the new political, social and economic contexts of postcolonial Mozambique could be interpreted as an instance of the recompositions of African identities that are underway in the African continent, and which Mbembe describes in "The New Africans":

> These recompositions take quite different forms in various countries; yet, they have in common that it is clear from their political, economic and cultural structures that they reflect not a state of anomy but rather a process of transnationalization. This process obeys specific logics and takes place on multiple scales. Yet, nearly everywhere, it highlights the conflict between a cosmopolitan vision and a nativist vision of African identity and culture (107).

Even though these recompositions are viewed by Mbembe as a positive aspect of African identities, signalling their dynamics, in an interview conducted by Celina Martins, Mia Couto establishes a parallel between this uncritical adoption of technological devices, which might be seen as a sign of globalization, to the passive reception of European influences during colonization:

> O que chega a estas culturas africanas não são as culturas europeias. São emanações, representações simbólicas por via da tecnologia. Mantemos ainda a imagem dos primeiros encontros dos descobridores europeus que trocavam umas **bugigangas** que reluziam diante dos olhos dos africanos. Estamos mais ou menos repetindo esse modelo de relação. Não existe globalização, o que existe é exportação e imposição de sinais, nem sequer são modelos, o modelo fica junto do produtor, os africanos consomem passivamente aqueles sinais mais brilhantes e apelativos ("O Estorinhador", bold in the original).

According to Madureira, the type of militant historical and political discourse used during the period of anti-colonial resistance, a discourse which paradoxically reduced colonized peoples to passive victims of the colonizers' ambitions, is manipulated in the context of contemporary Mozambique by Casuarino into a discourse that also perpetuates victimization and erases any sense of agency or responsibility in order to take advantage of the feelings of guilt potentially aroused among the citizens of former colonizing nations:

> One of the most ironic consequences of Mozambique's structural adjustment would thus be the conversion of this type of militant

> historiography into a commodity – a commodity, moreover, that has the supplementary therapeutic effect of atoning for what could be designated as "first-world" guilt (217).

In the stagings they set for the American couple, the inhabitants of Vila Longe turn their historical and cultural identities into a type of commodity that caters to the foreigners' expectations of finding a picture of an authentic Africa they have idealized in the Mozambican village. After watching the initial performance conducted by Mwadia in a rehearsed state of trance, the Americans exclaim excitedly: "Eis África autêntica (…)" (276). Besides the continual stress on victimization, it might be argued that by engaging in a process of presenting a forged context of authenticity to the foreigners, the inhabitants of Vila Longe also perpetuate the image of Africa as a paralyzed continent, incapable of evolving, just as Gaylard describes in *After Colonialism*: *African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*:

> The process of commodifying authenticity consisted in removing objects and practices from their spatial and temporal context and making them available on the market as authentic offerings, thus denying the "Third World" cultural dynamism (23).

Behind the accidental and deliberate misconceptions that arise between the inhabitants of Vila Longe and the Americans is the misrecognition, on both sides, of a common-sense circumstance outlined bluntly by Mwadia: "Há muitas maneiras de ser africana" (55). Couto's retrieval of a distant historical past in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* accordingly stresses the complexity and multiplicity of narratives that have been interwoven into present Mozambican identities, countering the perspectives both Casuarino and Southman hold on historical discourse as prone to teleological narrativization, available to be manipulated in order to serve particular ideological and material interests. Through an intricate combination of characters

and events from the historical and contemporary narratives in the novel, Couto raises penetrating questions about the motives behind this willful manipulation of history and the effects it has had on the self-representation of the Mozambicans:

> Eu sei que os mitos fundadores das nações têm que estar lá e a gente não pode interrogá-lo de um ponto de vista do rigor histórico mas estes nossos servem, por um lado, para a construção da nação mas, ao mesmo tempo, servem o lugar de uma certa elite que depois quer apagar o espírito crítico. No fundo esta elite de hoje está prolongando o que foi o papel de outras elites anteriores e estas elites anteriores foram cúmplices de muita coisa e hoje se coloca esta posição imaculada de que os africanos todos foram vítimas, nenhum teve culpa e isto é uma coisa que nos imobiliza e paralisa (Entrevista, Brugioni, ix).

Unsurprisingly, the villager who opposes Casuarino's plan more fiercely is former political prisoner and current barber of Vila Longe, Arcanjo Mistura, described in the novel as a "barbeiro revolucionário" (214). The majority of the arguments against the commodification of Vila Longe's historical memory attributed to his character are not delineated in the narrative itself, but in several reflective epigraphs that precede the chapters dedicated to the contemporary narrative. A constant and zealous defender of the revolutionary ideals that once constituted the basis of Frelimo's policies, Arcanjo Mistura expresses in many of these incisive epigraphs his bitter disappointment with what he regards as uncritical subservience to foreign interests in contemporary postcolonial Mozambique (made visible in the stagings of African authenticity rehearsed for the American couple by Casuarino):

> Não há pior cegueira que a de não ver o tempo. E nós já não temos lembrança senão daquilo que os outros nos fazem recordar. Quem hoje passeia a nossa memória pela mão são exactamente aqueles que, ontem, nos conduziram à cegueira (95).

Arcanjo Mistura is also highly critical of Benjamin's obsession with the question of race, which supports his headstrong attempt at establishing some form of political solidarity based solely on observed physiological features. The barber feels extremely upset about the African-American's attitude towards race, because for him, Southman "exibia a raça como uma doença para que o mundo sentisse comiseração. E usava a cor da pele como empréstimo de identidade" (220). In several of his non-literary writings, such as interviews or essays, Couto has expressed his disapproval of such mystifications of raciality, especially as they imply the conversion of physical distinctions into prerequisites of political allegiance: "Pensar que me alio a alguém porque somos da mesma raça não é apenas errado mas é historicamente pouco produtivo" (*Pensatempos*, 87). While Southman believes that black Africans should unite under the ideals of black nationalism in order to fight racial prejudice and its accompanying tendency to create hierarchies, Arcanjo Mistura rejects this kind of reasoning, supporting instead the idea that racial stratification can only be overcome when race is no longer emphasized but seen as just another social element of the human condition like language or religion: "Nós temos que lutar para deixarmos de ser pretos, para sermos simplesmente pessoas" (219).

Benjamin's need to belong to a particular location, even if it is a fictitious one, is an expression of his sense of his indeterminate identity. In the article "As Formas Africanas de Auto-Inscrição", Achille Mbembe explains that the notion of identity is inextricably linked with the question of origin: "A ideia é que não há identidade que não leve a questões relativas à origem e à ligação com elas, não importa que definição de origem seja dada e o quanto de ficção seja inerente a tal definição" (193).

Narratives that deal with characters travelling back to their cultural homelands in search of their origins frequently describe those characters as being assaulted by a personal neurosis of incompleteness, a need to be identified with a fuller centre of meaning (see Lawson, 53). After Benjamin decides to travel up the river in search of its (and his own) source, Rosie recognizes he is obsessed about Africa, where he hopes to find all the answers about himself:

> Ela sabia, desde o início, que a peregrinação a África iria degenerar em drama. Desde sempre, ela estranhara a obsessão do marido pelo retorno ao continente dos seus antepassados. Quem pode apostar tanto o presente num passado tão longínquo?
> Por um tempo até lhe ocorreu que Benjamin tivesse uma doença terminal e quisesse ir morrer em África. O motivo não era esse, mas andava próximo. O marido queria solver-se nesse lugar que era só dele, ele precisava desse espaço de redenção (342).

Benjamin's obsessive quest for his origins might be related to a feeling of incompleteness common to subjects who share a doubled subjectivity. The hesitation between the African and the American "halves" of their identity (which are not only felt to be different, but at times even radically opposed, resulting in great levels of anxiety) seems to contribute to a destabilizing feeling of uncertainty among certain African-Americans (now famously explored also by Barack Obama in his *Dreams from My Father*). Once in Africa, Harris stresses that indefinition when he reflects on his identity:

> So how does a Blackamerican travel to Africa? Certainly not as an African, for that I am not. Nor as a cultural European, for I am more than merely that. And more, too, than hybrid. Another race, perhaps, newborn and distinct, forged in the blast furnace of slavery, tempered and tested in the foundry of survival.
> We are an African people and perhaps we see the world and react to it differently. Perhaps we have different ideas about style and love, language and religion, and about the earth.

> At the same time we are an American people, products of a new culture and defined by it. And we see the world through American eyes.
> I felt like Jekyll and Hyde (28-29).

By choosing what he idealizes as the African half of his identity, Benjamin believes he will find the tranquillity he has never been able to enjoy in his life, torn and confused as he had always felt between his two identities. However, he fails to understand that both African identities and realities are bewilderingly complex and hardly locatable at all. Perhaps because he travelled to Africa as a journalist, and therefore carried the expectation that he would be critically examining what he found along with his reactions to it, Harris was able to recognize that complexity: "Africa is not easy. I love this place and resent it at the same time, and Africa reciprocates, trapped as we both are in this middle ground somewhere between black and white, past and future" (Harris, 286). Rather than providing answers, the complex postcolonial realities of most African countries reflect their inhabitants' own problematic identities, with the consequence that many identity questions become irremediably fragmented, only offering multiple perspectives: "In an allegory of the inner incompleteness, the [post]colonial social and cultural landscape is a wilderness that cannot be stitched into narrative, historical or subjective coherence" (Lawson, 13). Moreover, the depth and variety of factors (geographical, ethnical, linguistic, religious) pertaining to African identities can render the use of the designation "African" itself problematic:

> To accept that Africa can be in these ways a usable identity is not to forget that all of us belong to multifarious communities with their local customs; it is, not to dream of a single African state and to forget the complexly different trajectories of the continent's so many languages and cultures. "African" can surely be a vital and enabling badge; but in a world of genders,

> ethnicities, classes and languages, of ages, families, professions, religions and nations, it is hardly surprising that there are times when it is not the label we need (Appiah, "African Identities",91).

When the inhabitants of Vila Longe recreate his origins and even give him a new African name, Benjamin seems to have finally reached a new understanding of himself, no longer as part of a community or a race, but as an individual human being:

> Parou, olhou o céu e riu-se. *Já não sou afro-americano*, pensou. Agora que tinha um nome novo, pouco lhe interessava pertencer a uma identidade maior. Ao fim ao cabo, o Mestre Arcanjo Mistura estava com a razão. Ter pátria, ter raça, nacionalidade: que importância tinha? Bastava-se assim, Dere Makanderi, criatura muito pessoal e intransmissível. Um homem subindo um rio à procura da nascente. Da sua nascente (335-336).

After most of his assumptions about Africa are refuted by what he finds in Vila Longe, it looks as if Benjamin Southman has partially apprehended the meaning of the advice Arcanjo Mistura gave him when they met for the first time:

> -Você aqui, em Vila Longe, é só você: Benjamin Southman. E eu tenho pena de si, meu caro senhor.
> -Dispenso esse sentimento.
> -O que me faz sentir pena não é o que você procura em África, mas o que perdeu lá de onde vem.
> -O que é que perdi?
> -Voltem para a América, lá é que é a vossa casa. E vocês têm que lutar não é para serem africanos. Têm que lutar para serem americanos. Não afro-americanos. Americanos por inteiro (220).

Even though the enthusiasm for the adoption of the new African name could imply that his insistence on attaining an African identity has not entirely faded, Southman has apparently accepted the pointlessness of grouping identities according to supposedly innate features after recognizing himself as a unique but plural human

being.[10] Mia Couto frequently insists, both in his works and in his interviews, on the need to reject the simplistic categorization of identities, which reduces those identities to essentialist notions, emphasizing homogeneity and ignoring difference. He has constantly had to contest such notions of authenticity directed at or implied about himself and his works, to which he responds in forthright fashion:

> E aí se põe esta questão estúpida de hierarquizar moçambicanidades, como se houvesse uma forma mais moçambicana de ser e isso equivalesse a uma raça – e, depois, as outras estariam na periferia disso, iam-se afastando conforme fossem de pele mais clara ou tivessem outros estatutos culturais, sociais (Laban, 1028).

According to Brookshaw, the rejection of categories in the works of Mia Couto may be connected to the discrimination he suffered at the early stage of his literary career for being African and white, therefore not conforming to the reductive image both Africans and non-Africans have of how someone African should look physically (138). This kind of preconception regarding the issue of African authenticity was displayed by some of the critics to his first prose work when they

[10] Southman's mysterious disappearance up the Zambezi river intensifies the enigmatic ending of the contemporary narrative. The destiny of the African-American character and the motives for his heading in that direction may be hinted at, but remain somehow unclear. However, for Brookshaw, Southman's journey towards Zimbabwe (ruled by Rubert Mugabe, perhaps the most controversial Pan-Africanist politician) clearly implies that he is still attached to an extreme notion of Pan-Africanism (even though Pan-Africanist cultural and political movements tend to view all Africans and descendants of Africans as sharing cultural unity, Pan-Africanism does not refer to a single political ideology, but has been translated into disparate political and theoretical positions), thus approximating his ideals to those defended by the Jesuit missionary D. Gonçalo da Silveira in the sixteenth century: "No final do romance, Benjamin desaparece Zambeze acima em direcção ao Zimbabué, provavelmente em busca da África dos seus sonhos, mas também para, na senda do seu antepassado jesuíta do século XVI, converter os africanos – desta vez não ao sonho de cristianização do homem branco, mas ao sonho norte-americano de uma África Negra pura. Com efeito, Benjamin Southman é a versão afro-americana moderna do europeu branco, Gonçalo da Silveira, no sentido em que ambos revelam uma visão do mundo culturalmente monocromática e absolutista" (135).

accused him of not knowing Mozambique or its people well enough to write about them. Mia Couto has always responded to these critics by admitting his mixed Africanness, which brings his literary works closer to the complex web of cultural diversity that constitutes African identities: "Podemos ser diversas coisas. O erro é quando queremos ser apenas uma. O erro é quando queremos negar que somos diversas coisas ao mesmo tempo" (*Pensatempos,* 87-88). In "Mia Couto e as literaturas africanas de língua portuguesa", Pires Laranjeira briefly mentions the reception *Vozes Anoitecidas* met: "livro recebido, nalguns círculos, como perturbador da 'norma literária' e visto como infeliz modo de captar a fala popular" (197-198). For Pires Laranjeira, the controversy aroused by Couto's work could be explained as the result of "falta de maturidade da recepção especializada" (198). Looking into the question with further detail in "Literaturas Emergentes, Identidades e Cânone", Fátima Mendonça concludes that the conflicting opinions generated over Couto's work should be regarded as part of the country's complex process of adaptation to the new postcolonial circumstances:

> como literatura emergente ou pós-colonial (com tudo o que estes epítetos possam significar), a literatura moçambicana tem a sua prática/praxis inserida num passado de conflitualidade traduzido em várias oposições binárias de onde lhe advém a necessidade de afirmação identitária. Mas, em simultâneo, impõem-se-lhe as várias formas de relativismo trazidas por concepções do mundo, tendentes a desconstruir os vínculos que a inseriam num espaço e num tempo históricos (32).

Some of the most violent critiques of Mia Couto's first prose work had to do with the way the writer recreated the Portuguese language in his stories, mistakenly interpreted as a parody, but which actually enacted (and deeply respected) the way the Mozambicans themselves had reshaped the former colonial language. Couto has been clear on the issue:

> Nós não podemos construir uma literatura de costas viradas para a vida. As pessoas todas já estão falando outro português, há toda uma corrente de imagens, lindas, que as pessoas já estão fazendo, na rua. Como é que a gente pode pôr os nossos personagens, das nossas histórias, falando um português que não existe, que ninguém fala, aqui? Então é um pouco a tentativa de reproduzir aquela magia. E o processo de contar as histórias é tão importante como a própria história (Chabal, *Vozes*, 290).

To challenge the temptation to compartmentalise, Mia Couto portrays the characters of his narratives as unique but also plural human beings, each of them paradoxically representative of all humankind in both that uniqueness and plurality. In the initial epigraph to the collection of short stories *Cada Homem É Uma Raça*, when João Passarinheiro, a character from one of the short stories, is questioned by the police about his race, he wisely declares: "*Minha raça sou eu mesmo. A pessoa é uma humanidade individual. Cada homem é uma raça*…" (9). This aphoristic answer, and especially the last sentence, which would become the book's title, appears to be one of the writer's mottoes. In his description of each human being as an "individual humanity", Mia Couto seeks a balance between homogeneity and fragmentation, which, according to Boaventura Sousa Santos, is the most important challenge of post-colonial studies, especially for literature:

> O desafio é (…) o de encontrar uma dosagem equilibrada de homogeneidade e fragmentação, já que não há identidade sem diferença e a diferença pressupõe uma certa homogeneidade que permite identificar o que é diferente nas diferenças. (…) A literatura é, talvez, de todas as criações culturais, aquela em que melhor pode obter-se o equilíbrio dinâmico entre homogeneidade e fragmentação ("Entre Prospero", 35).

For Maria Fernanda Afonso, Mia Couto's rejection of dualisms and emphasis upon the individual inflection given to identity positions by

each individual ends up by focusing upon and reinforcing the universal characteristics of individual human beings:

> Em Mia Couto, a narrativa preconiza a supressão da violência dos contrários, tornando-se um espaço de desconstrução das antinomias, o lugar da reconciliação. Assumindo o papel de mediador no processo de transformação do mundo, o autor produz um novo discurso africano, comprometido não com uma ideologia mas com valores humanistas, na sua dimensão universal (449-450).

While Benjamin disappears in the river looking for his origins as Dere Makanderi, Rosie decides to go back home, not to the United States, but to Brazil, as her stay in Vila Longe and the stories its inhabitants shared with her in Portuguese, her mother tongue, helped her realise she was closer to her original culture than she had imagined: "Sonhar na língua materna lhe devolveu, por sua vez, um sentimento de tranquilidade que fazia tempo deixara de experimentar. Inexplicavelmente, ela nunca mais voltaria a apresentar-se como americana" (250). Before she leaves, she confesses to the inhabitants of Vila Longe that she and Benjamin had also created certain fictions about themselves. The intention of the foreign visitors was not really to contribute to the development of the local population, but to use the NGO's money for their personal interest in visiting a "lost Africa", where they could eventually find their roots. This relationship between the African-Americans and the inhabitants of Vila Longe, marked by lies and misconceptions on both sides, illustrates among other things, Mia Couto's critical judgement of the tendency present in Mozambican society (the government included) to rely on foreign aid, as well as of Western countries that still see the African continent as an exotic sideline to world affairs. That critical perspective can also be found in an essay written by Mia Couto entitled "A guerra é uma cobra que usa os nossos dentes para

nos morder", included in the collection of essays *The Paths of Multiculturalism – Travel Writings and Postcolonialism*:

> A Europa continua a visitar África como quem vai em peregrinação – para encontrar o que ela acredita ali ter deixado. África ainda olha a Europa com algum oportunismo desresponsabilizante – ficámos independentes mas não nos emancipámos (491).

Rather than principally deceiving one another, however, the African-Americans and the inhabitants of Vila Longe deceived themselves; the former, because they preferred to rely on the false security provided by stereotypes instead of risking finding new realities, and the latter because they agreed to take on what the foreigners expected from them, therefore denying their own complex identities.

An interesting aspect of *O Outro Pé da Sereia* is that most characters in the contemporary narrative are reticent about exposing their own subjectivities. When asked to talk about themselves or their ancestors, they either claim ignorance or resort to fantasy, in order to avoid facing negative circumstances connected with their past or being judged with respect to them. One of the events related to their past which they find difficult to deal with is the involvement of Africans in the slave trade. According to postcolonial studies theorist Achille Mbembe, unlike the Jewish memory of the Holocaust, the African memory of slavery is either non-existent or fractured. Mbembe explains that the silence on the subject is a result of guilt and of the refusal among Africans to talk about and accept the mistakes of the past:

> entre a memória dos afro-americanos sobre a escravidão e aquela dos africanos do Continente, há uma zona de sombra que dá margem a um profundo silêncio: o silêncio da culpa e da recusa dos africanos em enfrentar o inquietante aspecto do crime que diretamente envolve sua própria responsabilidade. Pois o destino dos escravos negros na modernidade não é

> apenas resultado da vontade tirânica e da crueldade do Outro – mesmo que estas sejam bem conhecidas (188).

Besides his own preconceptions, which he is unable to let go of, this heavy silence among the inhabitants of Vila Longe also contributes to Benjamin's misconceptions about Mozambique's current realities. When Casuarino is accused by the Vila Longe barber of presenting an exotic portrayal of Mozambique to the African-Americans, he admits that the main difference between himself and Benjamin was history. While Benjamin looked for traces of an African history he had imagined but which never existed in this form, Casuarino tried everything to hide the true history of Mozambique, not only from Benjamin, but mainly from himself:

> A única diferença era a História. Mas essa, a História, era a única coisa que Casuarino queria esconder do afro-americano. A razão dessa ocultação era o medo. Chico Casuarino tinha medo de se lembrar e não se reconhecer no homem que, um dia, já fora (339).

For Casuarino, deliberate forgetting functions as a kind of therapeutic amnesia, whose benefits will be not just personal but collective as well, as W. James Booth explains in *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*: "a void is created as individuals or societies forget, or choose to forget. Often what is repressed is a trauma, or crimes and misdeeds that would bring shame or divide the community and invite conflict" (76).

Whereas continental Africans wish to obliterate memories of slavery, African-Americans have been using them as a crucial cultural marker in the construction of their collective identities. As Ron Eyerman explains in "The Past in the Present", "Succeeding generations of American blacks have collectively formed themselves and renegotiated their relationship to the dominant society with

slavery as a backdrop" (166). In his analysis of the relationship between cultural trauma and collective memory, he concludes that both the representation of slavery and a strong indefinition regarding their subjectivity became crucial factors in the formation of the African-American identity:

> The notion of an "African American" emerged as part of the efforts of a generation of black intellectuals to come to grips with their, more collective, than individual, rejection by American society after being promised full integration following the end of the Civil War. Slavery, not so much as experience, but as a form of memory, was a focal point of reference in this process (…) Who were they, who were neither white nor fully-accepted Americans? It was here that the notion of an *African* American was put forward (…) (166; italics in the original).

In a sense, it might be argued that the workings of memory, which can be directed towards remembering as well as to forgetting, have contributed, on the one hand, to the obliteration among African peoples of their past involvement in the slave trade, particularly in pre-colonial times, and on the other hand, to the evocation of suffering caused by slavery among successive generations of African-Americans. As M'Bokolo puts it:

> É evidentemente por razões erradas que se reduz o tráfico de africanos apenas ao tráfico transatlântico levado a cabo pelos europeus. Esta redução deve muito, não tanto como se diz com demasiada frequência, à maior disponibilidade de fontes, mas muito provavelmente ao trabalho insidioso da memória entre os africanos, vitimas do tráfico, como entre os povos da Europa e da Ásia que o iniciaram (207).

The perspective held by Southman on slavery, and which the inhabitants of Vila Longe are willing to perpetuate, is connected to the concept of an idyllic pre-colonial African past that became corrupted by external influences. In "A fronteira da cultura", included in the collection of essays *Pensatempos*, Mia Couto criticises this

idealization of the African past, recalling that despite the proportions and damage the Atlantic slave trade caused to millions of Africans over three centuries, slavery was not entirely new to the continent:

> Quando os navegadores europeus começaram a encher de escravos os seus navios, eles não estavam estreando o comércio de criaturas humanas. A escravatura já tinha sido inventada em todos os continentes. Praticavam-na os americanos, os europeus, os asiáticos e os próprios africanos. A escravatura foi uma invenção da espécie humana. O que sucedeu foi que o tráfico de escravos se converteu num sistema global e esse sistema passou a ser desenvolvido de forma a enriquecer o seu centro: a Europa e, depois, a América do Norte (12).

After Benjamin's disappearance, Zeca Matambira apologizes to Rosie for not being able to provide concrete answers to their questions about the past of the inhabitants of Vila Longe. He tells Rosie that they had failed to help her and especially Benjamin, because they did not know the answers to those questions themselves. Understanding and describing who they are is as complex for the Mozambicans as it is for the African-Americans, not only because each person is unique and complex, but also because they too had been subject to multiple external influences. The history that had displaced the Americans geographically, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, also has the effect of displacing always already in time as well; the effects of time are to "move" human beings from any point in the past, which, given that supposed originary identities must necessarily be located in the past, will come to be inevitably experienced as some form of displacement. Whether Africans' ancestors had remained in Africa, been transported elsewhere, or arrived in Africa from somewhere else, they are all involved in a logic of displacement that has one thing in common: the need to situate oneself with respect to this past, or the need to represent one's present location in a way that we can make sense of ourselves. For

many, scarred with the categories of a colonial past, this has proven more difficult. For instance, Zeca Matambira is a former pugilist, who was influenced by the politics of the colonial regime to feel inferior because of the colour of his skin. This feeling of inferiority was so strong that it even made him physically and psychologically unable to combat against pugilists who were not black, as he regarded them as superior to him:

> Nem todos entenderam, mas Zeca Matambira ganhara uma dolorosa certeza: ele só era capaz de bater num negro, num homem de igual raça. A sua cabeça tinha sido ensinada a não se defender de um branco. Nem de um mulato. Matambira, o promissor pugilista de Tete, tinha sido derrotado no palco da vida antes de subir para o ringue do boxe (255).

Despite growing contemporary sensitivity to issues of so-called ethnicity and race, discrimination based on localised constructions of these categories continues to be widespread. Indeed, the categories inflect not only actions and representations directed at others but the ways in which the objects of such discrimination construct themselves. As Charles Taylor points out in his influential "The Politics of Recognition": "the thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or contemptible picture of themselves" (25). David Goldberg also highlights how such internalisations, through circulation over time, assume an authority that even changed social conditions can find difficult to break down. Indeed, Goldberg suggests that "racist exclusion finds whatever authority it has in a discourse of the body" (*Racist Culture*, 53), which is hardly surprising, given that its principal organising categories are visual. The consequences of this can be seen clearly in the case of Zeca Matambira, whose awareness

of his skin colour and of the negative aspects associated with it is so extreme that he even tries to change his physical aspect and his behaviour in order to look less African and more European:

> Não, ele sofrera fora de vergonha. Vergonha dos outros negros, pobres, desgraçados, grosseiros e, afinal, tão parecidos com ele. Fizera tudo para se distinguir. Todavia, aquela parecença não deixava nunca de lhe ser recordada. As ironias que a vida encerra: com um simples soco Matambira derrubava o mais agressivo dos adversários. Mas ele nunca tinha sido capaz de superar o seu acanhamento. E recordou o creme para aclarar a pele, os produtos para desencrespar o cabelo, a ocultação da sua origem humilde. Sim, a sua existência tinha sido sempre um permanente e nunca alcançado disfarce (343).

Besides stressing the multiplicity of Mozambican subjectivities, the inability to correspond to the foreigners' expectations implies a challenge to the very notion of original and authentic subjectivities, which the African-Americans believed they would find in Mozambique. The episode of the African-Americans' visit to Vila Longe, central to the contemporary narrative, accordingly stresses the contrast between the preconceived notions of Africa held by the foreign couple and the much more critical and fluid perspective Couto articulates through the narrator and the characters in the conversations they have with Benjamin and Rosie. According to Brookshaw, one of Couto's favourite subjects is enacted in the novel through the villagers' endeavours to recreate and perform a history/narrative based on written records that might confirm Southman's expectations:

> a relação entre o mundo oral e o escrito, entre história e ficção, entre memória e invenção, e, poderíamos acrescentar, entre encenação e identidade, ou seja, a ideia de que os papéis que representamos se tornam parte integrante da nossa identidade (135).

To prepare for the spiritual sessions staged for the foreign couple, Mwadia consults historical documents of the colonial era and transforms the information she collects into emotional descriptions, bringing together the apparently distinct notions of documented history and narrated memory:

> As lembranças fabricadas por Mwadia iam apurando tal veracidade, que os velhos choravam ao se confirmarem nelas, as mães acenavam afirmativamente, os americanos enchiam de anotações os seus cadernos.
> Benjamin Southman era categórico: tudo aquilo que, em êxtase, Mwadia ia recordando correspondia, de facto, à realidade histórica. Não havia dúvida: Mwadia estava realmente entrelaçando os tempos com as memórias, restituindo as cascas ao estilhaçado ovo (277).

The stagings of African authenticity Mwadia conducts for the American couple blend the notions of history, memory and fiction. Besides resorting to both authentic and fabricated memories related to the past of Vila Longe, Mwadia retrieves passages from the voyage undertaken by D. Gonçalo da Silveira to Mozambique (and which refer to the historical and fictional characters and events from the novel's historical narrative, in an ingenious strategy of internal intertextuality). Confronted by her mother, who wonders how she can display such a command of historical information, Mwadia reveals that her knowledge of the past comes from books and other written documents she has been consulting:

> Mwadia respondeu vagamente: os livros e os manuscritos eram as suas únicas visitações. De dia, ela abria a caixa de D. Gonçalo da Silveira e perdia-se na leitura dos velhos documentos. De noite, Mwadia ia ao quarto dos americanos e espreitava os papéis do casal. E lia tudo, em inglês, em português. E havia ainda a biblioteca que Jesustino tinha herdado.
> Nesses últimos dias, Mwadia fechava-se no sótão e espreitava a velha documentação colonial. Agora, ela sabia: um livro é uma canoa. Esse era o barco que lhe faltava em Antigamente. Tivesse

> livros e ela faria a travessia para o outro lado do mundo, para o outro lado de si mesma (278).

In the process of rehearsing for the spiritual sessions meant to enact an authentic African tradition, Mwadia discovers several important historical documents which she uses to rescue past events that are part of Vila Longe's collective memory, in a clear contradiction of the villagers' intentions of distorting and erasing those memories. While Mwadia's narratives convince the Americans, for whom Mwadia is being possessed by spirits that reveal details of Vila Longe's history, the villagers, who know the sessions are staged, start becoming anxious about Mwadia's unexpected historical revelations. During the first spiritual session, Mwadia warns the villagers about the dangers of trying to bury their memories, metaphorically represented as a falling star:

> -Não enterrem a estrela, não façam isso!
> -Que raio é que ela está dizendo?
> -A estrela está caindo, está caindo dentro de nós.
> Uma estrela?
> -Sim, uma estrela. Atravessa o tempo, está cruzando os séculos, agora está caindo. Todos os nossos mortos ganharam luz nessa estrela. E vocês deixaram esfriar esse pedaço do céu. Foram vocês…
> -Mas nós fizemos o quê, valha-nos Deus?!, torturava-se Jesustino.
> -Vocês enterraram a estrela. Aqui, no chão de Vila Longe, essa estrela foi sepultada. E vocês morreram nesse enterro (275-276).

The importance of the written word as a means of preserving the collective Mozambican memory which this episode underlines had already been explored by Mia Couto in previous works. Fonseca argues that one of the most significant aspects of *Terra Sonâmbula* is the way in which it highlights

> the importance of literary (…) for the redemption of collective memory indispensable to the reconstruction of Mozambican cultural values. Through access to the written word, Kindzu can record an existential journey in his notebooks that recuperate the values of tradition, conciliating them with a sense of tolerance. On the other hand, it is through a reading of these texts that Muidinga gradually gets closer to his lost identity (…) (57).

If for characters such as Mwadia in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* and Muidinga in *Terra Sonâmbula* accessing the past via written records becomes a challenging, but empowering, experience, for Manuel Antunes, who is entrusted with the task of keeping a diary of the journey from Goa to the Monomotapa, the process of recording the written word becomes an unbearable weight, as if somehow he is made responsible for the events he describes:

> Antunes não ganhava clareza na resposta. Escrever para ele se tornara num fardo. O grão de areia, a gota do mar, o elefante compacto e a lágrima leve, tudo se convertia em sua posse desde que fixado em letra. O caderno de viagens, explicou Antunes, ganhara um peso insuportável. Quando o lançou no fogo foi para se aliviar desse peso. Afinal, as palavras não enchiam apenas as folhas. Preenchiam-no a ele, proprietário de cada coisa descrita (186).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Lusophone writers in general are said to have become more aware of the complex realities of their national cultures and recognized the need to defy straightforward portrayals of those realities:

> Their work reflected a more complex reality in which heterogeneity reigned supreme and the notion of a dogmatic, single, and absolute truth became fragmented. This fragmentation offers very unstable grounds for the creation of a fixed identity, turning the Mozambique Couto culturally inscribes into an identity-in-progress that can never be definitely rendered without destroying its essence (Rothwell, 30).

This identity-in-progress is a consequence of the multiplicity of perspectives (internally and externally generated) at work in complex cultures, which certainly includes that of Mozambique:

> Where there is strain between received meanings on the one hand and personal experiences on the other, and where diverse perspectives confront one another, cultures can perhaps never be completely worked out as stable, coherent systems; they are for ever cultural "work in progress" (Hannerz, 14).

Assuming ignorance or uncertainty about certain subjects (such as who we are) can be positive, as a means of looking beyond putative essences, and as a possibility of questioning classifications, as Mia Couto suggests: "Às vezes é preciso exaltar a ignorância, no sentido em que o nosso saber não pode capturar aquilo que está para além da moldura, da classificação fácil" (Nunes). Moreover, uncertainty about their identities had been manipulated already as a survival strategy by the ancestors of the inhabitants of Vila Longe, protecting them from potentially dangerous situations:

> Esse desconhecimento era mais do que uma ignorância: era uma estratégia de sobrevivência antiga, tão antiga que a memória não podia alcançar. Os antepassados de Vila Longe, todos esses que viveram junto ao rio, tinham sofrido da mesma doença. Também eles, perante a pergunta "*quem são vocês*", responderiam: "*nós não somos quem vocês procuram*". Tinha sido assim desde há séculos: eles eram sempre outros, mas nunca exactamente "aqueles" outros (343).

In "Rios, Cobras e Camisas de Dormir", from the collection of essays *Interinvenções*, Mia Couto includes a reference to this episode from *O Outro Pé da Sereia* to emphasize once again the flexibility of identities alongside the various meanings associated with flowing rivers:

> Acreditamos que todos sabemos o que é um rio. No entanto, essa definição é quase sempre redutora e falsa. Nenhum rio é

> apenas um curso de água, esgotável sob o prisma da ideologia. Um rio é uma entidade múltipla. (…) esquecemos que estamos perante um organismo que nasce, respira e vive de trocas com a vizinhança.
> Durante o final do século XIX, o vale do Zambeze foi alvo de frequentes ataques, e os sucessivos ocupantes queriam fazer uso das habilidades de navegadores dos (…) Achikundas. A dado passo, este povo começou a sentir-se inseguro e, sempre que sabia da chegada de estranhos, a primeira coisa que fazia era amarrar a canoa nas pedras do fundo das águas. Depois, quando eram abordados, os Achikundas apresentavam-se do seguinte modo: "Nós não somos quem vocês esperam". Eles eram sempre outros, os do outro lado, da outra margem (54-55).

Water is a recurrent theme in Mia Couto's works, carrying certain standard European and specifically Portuguese symbolic freight:

> every time Couto mentions the sea, or draws on the symbolism of water, he enters a discourse on the deep that is both a cultural universal, as a store of human mythological and historical experience, and very particular to the experiences of lusophone Africa, as the medium which delivered the Portuguese, and inexorably linked the histories, cultures and languages of five disparate regions of the continent (Rothwell, 92).

Though resorting to a universal element such as water and its common associations with life and death, as well as to the realm of dreams, Mia Couto nevertheless manages to reveal much specific information about Mozambican culture. For him, beyond existing as a waterway of painful exploitation associated with colonialism and slavery, the Indian Ocean allowed important commercial, linguistic, religious and cultural exchanges between different continents, therefore becoming both vehicle of and constituent in the formation of Mozambican identities[11]:

[11] Even though the Indian Ocean was not exempt from slavery, it was in and around the Atlantic Ocean that the bulk of the slave trade from Africa to the New World took place. As a consequence, for the descendants of African slaves, the Atlantic

> Mais que obstáculo o oceano Índico foi um caminho, um cruzamento de culturas. Por suas águas chegaram navegantes de outros continentes, de outras raças, outras religiões. Na linha da costa moçambicana se teceram sociedades de trocas. Os navios eram a agulha que costurava esse imenso pano onde se estampam diversidades. (…) A linha que costurou o nosso país veio da água, da viagem, do desejo de ser outro (Couto, "Um mar", 28).

Despite the possibilities opened by the Indian Ocean, in the sixteenth century narrative it is portrayed as being associated with mystery and danger. As he senses the ship Nossa Senhora da Ajuda has abandoned the security of recognizable land and entered the domain of the Indian Ocean towards the unknown territory of the Monomotapa, D.Gonçalo da Silveira cannot avoid being overwhelmed by feelings of insecurity:

> Um vazio pesou sobre o estômago do sacerdote português. Quando saíra de Goa, ainda na protecção do estuário, a viagem surgia como um caminho dócil. Mas quando o mar se desdobrou em oceano e o horizonte todo se liquefez, lhe veio uma espécie de tontura, a certeza de que o chão lhe fugira e a nau vogava sobre um abismo. Silveira não tinha dúvida: chegara ao irreversível momento em que a água perde o pé e o mundo se resumiria àquela nau, rompendo caminho entre domínios que eram mais do Diabo que de Deus (65).

In the novel, oceans and rivers are deeply connected with the questions of identity and of the reshaping potential of the voyage. As

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Ocean became a powerful symbol of the paradoxical notions of denial and embodiment of both their humanity and history (see Low, 116). In the Preface to *Um Mar da Cor da Terra*, as he observes the brownish colour the Atlantic Ocean presents in Ilhéus, Brazil, Miguel Vale de Almeida suggests its connection with the conflict felt among Afro-Brazilians between their past African origins and the lives they built on the other side of the Atlantic: "Este mar da cor da terra é, pois, uma imagem que condensa o aparente paradoxo entre o fluxo e o ancoramento, a busca – sobretudo pelos afro-descendentes – de um lugar na terra do novo mundo sem esquecer o culto da terra de 'origem' do outro lado do mar, de onde portugueses e luso-brasileiros arrancaram os seus antepassados" (xi).

has already been seen, Benjamin Southman disappears up the Zambezi in search of both the river's and his own origins. Mwadia travels along the river to return to Vila Longe in a voyage back to her origins that will become a crucial point in the narrative, bringing contemporary and past Mozambique together through the village's oral and written memories. However, it is when Mwadia crosses the river to Antigamente, after deciding to leave the image of Our Lady by the riverside, that the direction of the several voyages in the novel is apparently unveiled:

> A viagem termina quando encerramos as nossas fronteiras interiores. Regressamos a nós, não a um lugar. Mwadia sentia que retornava aos labirintos de sua alma enquanto a canoa a conduzia pelos meandros do Muzenguezi (379).

Like D. Gonçalo da Silveira, Mwadia becomes truly aware she is initiating her voyage when she can no longer recognize territory she is familiar with:

> A viagem não começa quando se percorrem distâncias, mas quando se atravessam as nossas fronteiras interiores. A viagem acontece quando acordamos fora do corpo, longe do último lugar onde podemos ter casa. Mwadia Malunga sentiu que realmente viajava quando perdeu de vista o único casebre de Antigamente (77).

Even though both associate the beginning of their voyages with the entrance into a different territorial domain, they gradually realize that their voyages are as much personal as geographical, implying much more than crossing seas, rivers or land.

The rivers, which are inhabited by fantastic creatures, are also a symbol of the dissolution of frontiers. Water not only dissolves the limits between the natural and the supernatural, it also eliminates types of division that may exist between people. The old wizard Lázaro explains to Benjamin that it makes no sense to separate

people according to their different religious beliefs, since the connection between humankind and the spiritual sense of water is common to most religions:

> -É tudo a mesma água, todos os rios são irmãos, todos correm em nossas veias.
> Era indiferente que o baptismo tivesse ocorrido no outro lado do planeta. E pouca diferença fazia que ele tivesse cumprido os rituais católicos. Jesus Cristo, afinal, não era mais que um espírito das águas. Por isso, o filho de Deus caminhou sobre os mares. Por essa razão, ele transformou a água em vinho. E ainda por causa dessa condição, os apóstolos eram pescadores (319).

When Dona Constança, Mwadia's mother, decides to reveal to her daughter that there had been a slave as well as a slave owner among her ancestors, water is used again as a metaphor for the diversity of identities: "- Somos todos feitos assim: de duas águas" (376).

There is also a very strong relation between the statue of Our Lady and water. The statue, a symbol of the Catholic missionary enterprise, travelled across the oceans to reach its final destination, Mozambique, and ended up buried by the riverside, a site inhabited by African water goddesses. Throughout the novel, many characters of African descent associate the statue with African water goddesses, such as Nzuzu, Kianda and Mama Wati. For several characters in both the sixteenth century and the contemporary narratives the image of Our Lady is identified with multiple meanings, but always maintaining an important connection with a supernatural realm, as can be observed in the sixteenth century narrative, when Catholics as well as followers of African traditional religions aboard the ship resort to Our Lady for protection when faced with a terrible storm that threatens their voyage:

> Para os grumetes e marinheiros era o Corpo Santo que se aquietava. Para os do porão eram os espíritos dos antepassados

> que se reconciliavam com os viventes. A imagem de Nossa Senhora cobria os receios de uns e outros (185).

Contrasting with the essentialist notions of identity held by D. Gonçalo da Silveira and Benjamin Southman, the image of Our Lady functions in the novel as a symbol of the instability and multiplicity of identities, constituting therefore "the most powerful symbol of (...) hybrid articulations of cultural difference" (Madureira, 223). In one of the most intriguing episodes in the novel (which seems to be at the origin of the novel's title), Nimi Nsundi decides to cut off the statue's wooden feet, so that she would be able to return to water, her natural element:

> Vão-me acusar dos mais terríveis crimes. Mas o que eu fiz foi apenas libertar a deusa, afeiçoar o corpo dela à sua forma original. O meu pecado, aquele que me fará morrer, foi retirar o pé que desfigurava a Kianda. Só tive tempo de corrigir uma dessas anormais extremidades. Só peço que alguém mais, com a mesma coragem que me anima, decida decapitar *o outro pé da sereia* (242, my italics).

Nimi Nsundi does not entirely succeed in his attempt at freeing the African goddess from the elements that in his view oppressed and disfigured her, but it appears that the religious image becomes located closer to its identification in the novel as a sign of hybridity and religious syncretism after it loses only one of its feet, thus becoming half African siren, half European saint. We might say that the siren's other (remaining) foot illustrates a postcolonial perspective on Mozambique; one that does not support the picture of a past exempt from exogenous cultural influences, even though it stresses the relevance of tradition, but that regards them instead as the result of complex transcultural processes that have contributed to the shaping of contemporary Mozambican social, historical and cultural contexts. The amputated saint/siren could also be regarded

as a symbol of Mozambican postcolonial literature in its deliberate plurality and its appeal for recreation:

> A textualidade pós-colonial é necessariamente um fenómeno hibridizado, ou plural, no sentido de coexistência de uma pluralidade de formas e de propostas, resultantes da relação entre os sistemas culturais europeus enxertados e as ontologias indígenas, com o seu impulso de criar ou recriar identidades locais, novos campos literários.
> Não é possível regressar a uma pureza pré-colonial absoluta (…) As literaturas africanas de língua portuguesa, com a criação dos seus campos literários específicos, relatam as narrativas desse impossível regresso ao passado, entretecendo, com sabedoria, a sua reinvenção (…)(Leite, 36).

In the narrative that takes place in the sixteenth century, Manuel Antunes, a priest who is accompanying D.Gonçalo da Silveira, begins to question the whole purpose of their mission during the voyage to Mozambique. He observes the inhumanity that the African slaves on the ship are subject to and feels so compassionately towards their misery and so identified with their condition that he claims to have become one of them:

> Até dia 4 de Janeiro, data do embarque em Goa, ele era branco, filho e neto de portugueses. No dia 5 de Janeiro, começou a ficar negro. Depois de apagar um pequeno incêndio no seu camarote, contemplou as suas mãos obscurecendo. Mas agora era a pele inteira que lhe escurecia, os seus cabelos se encrespavam. Não lhe restava dúvida: ele se convertia num negro (190).

The encounters between the so-called Old and New worlds originated many situations similar to that experienced by Manuel Antunes:

> The civilized white European in contact with the primitive encounters an other that is, to the romantic or nostalgic self, the very epitome of the instinctive. Under these circumstances, the discontented, civilized white European may feel tempted (and also feel threatened) by the prospect of "going black". (At the

> extreme, such an individual may even feel that to go black, to go primitive, or to go instinctive would be to "go insane") (Adams, 52).

Before he understands how to deal with these new experiences, Manuel Antunes is assaulted by mixed feelings of excitement and fear. Even though he confesses to D.Gonçalo that he is happy about "going black", he also admits he is anxious and worried about his mental state: "O que lhe queria pedir, D. Gonçalo, é que proteja o meu sono. Sinto que estou ficando louco" (189).

After arriving in the country, he gives up being a priest and decides to adopt and adapt to an African way of life. He realises that the changes he has undergone while in contact with the African realities during the voyage and after arriving in Mozambique were not physical and external, but mental and internal. He understands that to feel African he does not have to change race, but rather to live as an African: "- Agora estou certo: ser negro não é uma raça. É um modo de viver. E esse será, a partir de agora, o meu modo de viver" (301). The case of Manuel Antunes can be seen as an example of "cafrealização", a phenomenon that along with miscegenation was common in the Portuguese colonies, and a result of the indefinition of the Portuguese colonizers' identity. Boaventura de Sousa Santos explains in "Entre Prospero e Caliban" (see pages 54-64) that the indecisiveness of the Portuguese between the role of colonizer (of the African peoples) and that of colonized (by other European countries, namely Britain) created an inter-identity that lead to the close but distinct manifestations of "cafrealização" and miscegenation. Whereas miscegenation refers to the sexual union of different races and also to the children who result from those unions, "cafrealização" refers to a complex process of identification with a new culture. The term "cafrealização" (equivalent to the English term "going native") was

created to designate the Portuguese colonizers who rejected aspects of their original culture and adopted the Africans' way of life, including their traditions and languages. Even though the word "cafre" didn't have a negative connotation as a way of referring to a person of African origin until the 19th century, the designation "cafrealização" nevertheless had a stigmatizing sense, representing the colonizers' ambivalent feelings of repulsion and attraction towards a different culture.

Although Manuel Antunes starts to live according to African cultural flows, his rupture with Portuguese culture is incomplete. In his case, there is not a complete rejection of the original culture, nor a perfect adherence to the new culture. This incompleteness in the adaptation to a different culture is not only internal, as it is very difficult for any individual to voluntaristically banish all aspects of one's original culture, but also external, as the Mozambicans find it hard to recognize a white man of European origins who had been a priest as one of them. Even though Manuel Antunes believes he has a new identity (reinforced by the adoption of an African name, that of the dead slave Nimi Nsundi), his African identity is not validated by the surrounding Mozambicans, which leads to his adopting an intermediate identity, enacted in hybrid cultural practices :

> O nome "Nimi Nsundi" só existia na cabeça do sacerdote. Na verdade, as pessoas da aldeia chamavam-no de Muzungu Manu Antu e estavam lidando com ele como um nyanga branco. Manuel Antunes, ou seja, Manu Antu, aceitara tacitamente ser considerado feiticeiro, rezador de bíblia e visitador de almas (361).

In the case of the Portuguese Manuel Antunes, as in the case of the African-American Benjamin Southman, there is a strong connection between what they assume to be their identity and their location. Both these characters had no previous contact with the African

continent before arriving in Mozambique, but the African country becomes a crucial and defining element of their identity. Mbembe explains that there are several ways in which the association between identity and location may be experienced:

> não há identidade sem territorialidade, que não seja a vívida consciência de ter um lugar e ser dono dele, seja por nascimento, por conquista ou pelo fato de ter se estabelecido em um dado local e este se ter tornado parte da sua auto-representação (193).

The sixteenth century narrative is thus crucial in the novel because it helps to trace the fragmentation of subjectivities at a crucial period in Mozambique's history. This narrative reveals the multiple contacts (mostly related to commercial interests) that already existed at the time in that region of Africa. It shows how the commercial and religious contacts established between Africa, Asia and Europe naturally constituted the basis for forms of cultural exchange as well.[12] In a way, as Mia Couto mentions in an interview given to a Brazilian newspaper, globalization was already a reality in sixteenth century Mozambique:

> A globalização é algo que sempre existiu. O primeiro homem caminhava já na senda de um mundo que ele entendia ser global, projetado à dimensão dos seus sonhos, dos seus receios. (…) O que hoje chamamos de globalização como tendência uniformizadora não é mais forte do que a necessidade de trocar, comerciar identidades e mestiçar influências (Entrevista, *Globo*).

The historical narrative accordingly counters the image of a "pure" Africa before the arrival of the Portuguese, by admitting the

[12] Another East African writer whose work is tirelessly committed to outlining the troubled history of intercultural contact as something much wider than that between Africans and Europeans, and as something that has always involved the instrumentalisation of human beings by more powerful groups, is the Zanzibar writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, in such works as *Paradise* (1995) or *By the Sea* (2001).

involvement of African peoples in the slave trade. D.Gonçalo is extremely surprised when he is told by Xilundo, one of the slaves who had sailed from Goa to Mozambique, that his family was in the slave business and that his voyage had been a way of learning more about the business:

> Xilundo explicou-se: ele era escravo, mas a sua família era proprietária de escravos. Viviam disso: da captura e da venda de escravos. O pai enviara-o para Goa, na condição de servo, como punição de graves desobediências. O projecto do pai era simples: preparar o filho para herdar o negócio da venda de pessoas. No processo de ser escravo ele aprenderia a escravizar os outros (300).

The narrative demonstrates a constant tendency to outline and juxtapose misunderstandings generated by the contact between different cultures and preconceptions based on ignorance of those cultures. For example, a series of misunderstandings, resulting from the ignorance of the concept of celibacy, leads the Emperor of the Monomotapa to mistakenly assume that the statue of Our Lady is D.Gonçalo's wife. Even though the novel stresses the potentially dangerous outcomes of ignorance and false preconceptions, this embarassing episode is narrated in a good-humoured way: "A informação que chegou ao imperador foi que o padre branco tinha por esposa uma formosíssima mulher digna de todo o agrado" (304).[13] During his stay on the Ilha de Moçambique, D. Gonçalo da Silveira is surprised by the description he hears from a local of the inhabitants of the Monomotapa, the destination of his mission: "*Esses*

[13] There are references to this episode in historical texts, as implied by Capela in his contextualization and explanation of the origins of the expression "mozungo": "Quando o padre Gonçalo da Silveira chegou ao Monomotapa com uma imagem de Nossa Senhora da Graça foram dizer ao rei que o jesuíta tinha uma *mozunga*, isto é, segundo o cronista, mulher de grande formosura" (Capela, 104, italics in the original).

que vivem lá no interior não são como nós" (295)[14]. D. Gonçalo is struck by the descriptions of the inhabitants of the Monomotapa he hears, but Manuel Antunes tries to convince him there are no logical reasons to be afraid, as they cannot be too different from Europeans:

> Chegados a casa, o missionário juntou os membros da delegação para debater os perigos que pareciam cercar a expedição. Antunes contrariou o crescente alarmismo.
> -*Vai ver, D.Gonçalo, que, uma vez em terras do Monomotapa, descobriremos que os cafres não são nada disso, não são esses monstros que aqui nos falam…*
> -*Deus o escute.*
> -*Eu acho, com todo o respeito, que eles serão ainda piores.*
> -*Como piores, padre Antunes?*
> -*Vai ver que eles são iguais aos brancos* (296).

D. Gonçalo reacts violently to Antunes's statement, but soon after he arrives in Mozambique and observes the reality of the Portuguese colony, he realizes the monsters he had predicted he would find on the African continent had actually come in the Portuguese ships in the shape of greed, lust and corruption:

> Durante anos, D. Gonçalo anteviu o longo desfile de monstros que iria encontrar em África. Havia um imenso catálogo de criaturas diabólicas. Havia os ciápodes, com seu único pé gigante, os ciclopes, as galinhas lanosas, as plantas-bichos cujos frutos eram carneiros, os cinocéfalos, os dragões, os antípodas, as bestas de cabeça humana que encarnavam Satanás. Nenhum desses seres prodigiosos ele encontrara em meses de andanças pelos sertões africanos. As mais maléficas criaturas com quem cruzava eram-lhe, afinal, bem familiares e tinham, como ele, embarcado nas naus portuguesas (358).

[14] In the novel *Paradise*, Abdulrazak Gurnah depicts a multiethnic East-African society permeated by strong and deep ethnic differences: "His father did not like him to play far from home. 'We are surrounded by savages', he said. 'Washenzi, who have no faith in God and who worship spirits and demons which live in trees and rocks. They like nothing better than to kidnap little children and make use of them as they wish" (Gurnah, 6). In the novel, black Africans are portrayed by Mohammed Abdalla, who calls himself an "Arab", as "ignorant savages who believe their own childish nightmares" (144). This linguistic abuse is revelatory of a power relation between Arabs and black Africans which is very similar to that between Europeans and black Africans, who are the weakest link in both (see Callahan).

Exploring Portuguese textual representations of Africa and its peoples during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in *Moorings - Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa*, Josiah Blackmore articulates the feelings of great anxiety towards the unknown that arose among those involved in the Portuguese expansionist project:

> Expansion is by definition a process of displacement, alienation, and outsiderness. To extend the boundaries of the *pátria* (country) outward is to create and inhabit foreignness. However ideologically cohesive the expansionist enterprise might be as rendered by its apologists, in practical terms its implementation is often disorienting, fraught with danger, and met with peril. Conquest voyagers confront the limits of knowledge and of supposed military or linguistic superiority in empirical terms that are as unexpected as they are dangerous. As itinerant conquerors, colonizers, traders, and missionaries become displaced from a grid of power and authority of the home country, they become out of place. (…) As the initial space of Portuguese expansion, Africa is therefore a vast contact zone between Europeans, Africans, Western knowledge, and the world "out there". Luso-African encounter – if we momentarily accept the viability of distinguishing "Portuguese" from "African" as stable categories of identity – generates the strange as a product of the encounter between the spheres of experience and perception (74-75).

Despite the anticipated strangeness he felt towards the native populations of the Monomotapa and some of their customs, the unexpected disillusionment with the members of the Portuguese colony, who became the biggest obstacle to his mission, transformed D. Gonçalo's fierceness into bitterness. As Jean-François Bayart points out in "*Fait Missionnaire* & Politics of the Belly", both colonized and colonizers were affected at various levels by the colonizing project, given that "colonization was an experience of subjectivation for the Europeans themselves" (93). This perspective implies that it was necessary for European colonizers to adjust their representations of the Western and of the African worlds to the circumstances they

were faced with, something both D. Gonçalo da Silveira and Benjamin Southman were apparently unable to fully accomplish. Even though more than three centuries apart, the journeys undertaken by D. Gonçalo da Silveira and Benjamin Southman to Mozambique share many aspects. Motivated by seemingly opposite objectives – as part of the Portuguese expansionist project that led later to colonialism, D.Gonçalo wished to convert the African peoples of the Monomotapa to Christianity, while the African-American Southman hopes to be able to trace his enslaved African roots and unite all Africans through the denunciation of the misdeeds committed by European colonizers – both rely on erroneous and reductive preconceptions about African history and culture, which will be challenged during their stay in Mozambique, shattering the projects they have devoted their lives to.

Ironically, around the same time that the Portuguese colonizers described African peoples as having physical and mental characteristics rendering them inferior, the peoples of Northern Europe did the same regarding the Portuguese:[15]

> As características com que os Portugueses foram construindo, a partir do século XV, a imagem dos povos primitivos e selvagens das suas colónias são muito semelhantes às que lhe são atribuídas a partir da mesma altura por viajantes, comerciantes

[15] In *Um Mar da Cor da Terra*, sociologist Miguel Vale de Almeida describes a contemporary episode that underlines the intermediate location of the Portuguese identity as perceived by others. During his stay on the multiethnic island of Trinidad, he is introduced to Jo-Anne Ferreira, who had extensively researched and written on her Portuguese ancestry (the results of her research work having been published in a work entitled *The Portuguese of Trinidad and Tobago, Portrait of an Ethnic Minority*). From the conversations held with the researcher and his own observations, Vale de Almeida becomes aware that the Portuguese who live in Trinidad are regarded by the other ethnic groups on the island as neither belonging sociologically to the European Creole elite nor to the African or Indian proletariat, but as fitting someplace in between: "Ingenuamente pensei, no princípio, que a pesquisa de Jo-Anne constituísse uma tentativa de ascensão social num contexto em que a origem étnica é determinante. O meu raciocínio era o seguinte: oriunda de uma família mista, o reforço da sua portugalidade aproximá-la-ia do grupo dos brancos. O raciocínio foi rapidamente complicado pelo facto de, historicamente, os portugueses na Trinidad terem sido considerados como 'nem brancos nem pretos', sobretudo pela sua posição sócio-económica intermédia" (9).

> e religiosos vindos da Europa do Norte; do subdesenvolvimento à precaridade das condições de vida, da indolência à sensualidade, da violência à afabilidade, da falta de higiene à ignorância, da superstição à irracionalidade (Sousa Santos, "Entre Prospero", 48).

In the novel *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, we can observe how narratives, characters, times, spaces and events that appear isolated at first glance eventually become intertwined, both reflecting and reflecting on the complexities of differing identity manoeuvres. The doubly reflective character of narrative is analysed by Maria Lúcia Lepecki in an article entitled "*Vozes Anoitecidas*, o acordar", included in her book *Sobreimpressões - Estudos de Literatura Portuguesa e Africana*:

> Como em qualquer escritor que domina a sua arte, também em Mia Couto os espaços reflexivos não se autonomizam dos poéticos – entendidos como criativos em forma específica de narração. Pelo contrário, contar e pensar são para o Autor uma só e a mesma actividade; e isso enquadra-se em duas tradições literárias. Na boa linha da literatura erudita (…) tanto quanto na boa linha da literatura oral e popular, onde o narrar sempre *reflecte*. E em dois sentidos: *espelha* o mundo e *pensa* sobre ele (175, italics in the original).

Narration and what Lepecki designates as reflection create spaces of freedom and ambiguity in Mia Couto's works. The language he wields challenges linguistic conventions through the use of a creative word play which not only reveals an excellent command of both Mozambican and Portuguese forms of Portuguese, but confers a lyrical dimension to his writings. This inventive and metaphorically rich language consequently requires readers to participate vigorously in its interpretation/s, for its neologisms offer various possibilities of meaning. There seems to be a connection between identity and language in the works of Mia Couto, as the characteristics of instability and multiplicity associated with identity in his works are also found in his use of the Portuguese language: "He privileges

linguistic innovation and word play in such a way that meaning can never be absolute in his texts. Instead, it is subject to multiple interpretations and shifting perspectives" (Rothwell, 30).

As Maria Fernanda Afonso explains in *O Conto Moçambicano*, the Portuguese Mia Couto moulds to represent the Mozambicans' use of the former colonial language "torna-se uma das vias de acesso à representação da complexidade do mundo africano" (214). The language that results from the adaptation of a European language to an African usage signals the dynamically mixed resources of the post-colonial subject, influenced by the interaction of Western and African linguistic, cultural, and religious systems.

The new possibilities of meaning opened up by Mia Couto's lyricism defy linguistic and cultural conventions, forcing readers to question those conventions and encouraging them towards new understandings of the issues and realities articulated in his narratives:

> As palavras, ao recusarem jogar o jogo habitual da submissão ao real, manifestam uma carga mágica. Elas irradiam em cada parcela de representação da realidade os faustos de um universo mágico. Convocam um desejo de viver e de recriar. (…) As novas palavras (…) são uma provocação contra a organização estabelecida: exigem uma outra compreensão da arquitectura semântica da narrativa que contém uma verdade mais complexa; significam um meio de lutar contra a angústia dos constrangimentos culturais (…) (Afonso, 381-382).

Besides Afonso, critics like Pietro Deandrea and Gerald Gaylard have also indicated that Couto's linguistic and narrative style exists as one of the most distinguishing traits of the particular kind of magical realism found in his works. [16] In "Carnival and Magic in Kojo

[16] Despite the critics' agreement with respect to considering particular features of his works as magical realist, Mia Couto commonly expresses his reluctance to use or accept such a categorization: "A única coisa que eu posso dizer é que estou tentando criar… beleza, mostrar um pouco o que é a possibilidade de alguém fazer

Laing", Deandrea analyses the characteristics of Couto's "peculiar" (224) magical realism, and explains that "poetry" is very common in magical-realist novels, because the strategies of a certain type of poetry are a way of emphasizing the magic of the real (222). The lyrical tone of Mia Couto's language suits his description of Mozambican realities, in its contrasting but coexistent aspects of tender magic and cruel irrationality. The dream-like situations conveyed in Couto's works seem to enact a kind of tension in the writer's narratives between a desperate awareness of the harsh conditions of daily life and an underlying hope to change that reality:

> Mia Couto's *contos* straddle the line between reality and fantasy. Although ostensibly about the lives of ordinary men and women in today's Mozambique, the stories are at once detailed in their account of the realities of daily life and (for the most part) fantastic at their core.(…) The stories are uncannily familiar, they appear plausible but are as magical or fantastic as fairy tales. They are rooted in everyday life but they tap the Mozambican African collective unconscious (*Lusophone Africa*, 78).

In *O Outro Pé da Sereia,* Vila Longe, depicted as a ghost village inhabited by genuine and fabricated memories of the past, seems to be the perfect setting for this combination of apparent contradictory aspects of reality such as the natural and the supernatural: "Em Vila Longe, todavia, só o impossível é natural, só o sobrenatural é credível" (109). For Afonso, this "tensão subtil, mas constante, entre o abandono ao mundo, tal como ele se encontra em face do escritor, e uma clara vontade construtiva na sua relação com ele" (367) clearly marks Couto's magical realism. Gaylard emphasizes the

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uma língua sua. De criar a partir da desarrumação daquilo que é o primeiro instrumento de criação, que seria a língua, a linguagem, e os modelos de uma narrativa. Por exemplo, abolir esta fronteira entre poesia e prosa. Porque é que a coisa tem que estar arrumada, porque é que é preciso haver essa categorização de géneros literários… o realismo mágico, o realismo neo-realista?" (Chabal, *Vozes*, 289)

influence of oral narratives and their potential to impact upon reality in the works of Mia Couto:

> Couto views himself as part of a chain of voices that relates stories, and his interest is in the way in which those stories impact upon or create reality. This has implications for his particular version of postcolonialism, which is that reality is influenced by the workings of the mind (…) (108).

Deandrea suggests that daily reality is the basis for the particular magical realism in the works of Mia Couto (224), in which the drama and beauty of Mozambican reality become emphasized, as in the following passage of *O Outro Pé da Sereia* that describes how Mwadia invents a strategy to combat her loneliness in Antigamente, the desolate place where she lives with her husband:

> Em silêncio, Mwadia foi à varanda e desamarrou o nó que atava duas fitas de pano vermelho. Não corria brisa, as fitas tombaram, pesadas, no chão. Fazia anos que ela pendurava, de forma cruzada, os dois pedaços de pano na travessa de madeira que sustentava o tecto. Era um expediente contra a saudade que fazia justiça à sua fama de «inventadeira», como lhe chamavam na sua casa da infância. Nessa mesma casa, em Vila Longe, pequenas aves pousavam constantemente nos beirais. O lugar onde agora vivia, porém, não tinha céu para pássaros. Nos dias em que ventava, os panos estremeciam e eram duas asas de uma ave silenciosa, tão silenciosa como o marido, como os burros, como as pedras da paisagem (34).

As the writer often mentions in interviews, the magical atmosphere created in his works was greatly influenced by the stories he used to listen to as a child, both in Portuguese and in Chissena:

> Mas, como te disse, recordo-me das histórias que me eram contadas – quer em português, quer em chissena – pelos velhos e pelas pessoas que pertenciam a esse mundo, que transportavam esse outro imaginário. (…)
> E creio que, talvez sem me aperceber, eu ainda hoje volto muito a histórias que me foram contadas há muitos, muitos anos, das

> quais só me lembro de pedaços, de coisas que me assustavam, que me tiravam o sono como criança! (Laban, 1011)

The language recreated by the author, reminiscent of oral storytelling, is thus in part a means of recovering the playfulness of traditional storytellers:

> Mas eles contam histórias no sentido completo, eles fazem o teatro todo: cantam, dançam… E eu pensei: seria necessário transportar para o domínio da escrita, do papel, este ambiente mágico que esses contadores de histórias criam. E isso só é possível através de, número um, a poesia e, número dois, uma linguagem que utilize este jogo de dança e de teatro que eles faziam. Então foi aí que eu comecei, de facto, a experimentar os limites da própria língua e a transgredir no sentido de criar um espaço de magia (Laban, 1016).

This linguistic recreation in Mia Couto's narratives of the stories he was told as a child may be seen as a wish to retrieve a mythical time and space often associated with childhood and the narratives enjoyed by children:

> Nos textos de Mia Couto, o mundo ressuscitado pela lembrança adquire dimensões extraordinárias, não só porque pertence a um tempo recuado, situado fora do curso normal do tempo, mas principalmente porque representa um universo mítico onde a palavra testemunha a presença do invisível, onde o sonho faz parte do real (Afonso, 209).

However, as is clear in *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, the recovery of the magical qualities of oral storytelling does not imply a glorification of the past. Analysing the production and criticism of contemporary African writing, Chinweizu identifies three dominant attitudes towards the African past: shamefaced rejection, romantic embrace, and realistic appraisal (Chinweizu, 256). Although Couto's narratives evoke the atmosphere and language of traditional storytelling (which might appear to reveal a certain sentimentalisation of the past), they

also nevertheless reveal a clear-headed appraisal of the African past. In *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, the inhabitants of Vila Longe are forced to remember their past through the return of Mwadia and the visit of the foreign visitors, Rosie and Benjamin, and they eventually recognize that before the Portuguese arrived in Mozambique there was already slavery among Africans. Presenting a realistic portrayal of the Mozambican pre-colonial past, Mia Couto seems to follow Chinweizu's advice for contemporary African writers to avoid idealizing such a historical period:

> In the task of decolonization we cannot afford an uncritical glorification of the past. We may brandish our memories of empires of ages ago as shields against Western disparagement but we also know that before colonialism came there was slavery. Who hunted the slaves? And who sold them for guns, trinkets and gin? And the African attitudes and roles which made that slave trade possible, are they not part of that nostalgic past? (Chinweizu, 257).

Recognizing one's personal as well as collective past mistakes may be empowering, but is also a complex and painful process, due to the difficulty of admitting one's faults and to the sense of shame and guilt associated with the acknowledgement of past wrongdoings.[17] To avoid the feeling of remorse, the inhabitants of Vila Longe resort to a

[17] In contexts such as these, the feelings of shame and guilt are closely related as they are both associated with past wrongdoings. Recently, however, distinctions between the two notions have been subject to scrutiny and discussion. Looking at the main differences between the two aspects, Booth proposes that whereas shame can be felt even when there is no direct involvement in the deed (as in the case of the inhabitants of Vila Longe, whose ancestors, and not themselves, may have participated in the slave trade), guilt is directly linked with agency and intentionality. As a mark of having failed, the feeling of shame is more pervasive than guilt, given that it is recognized through people's lives and of their communities, while guilt is associated with discrete actions an individual has committed. Another aspect that distances the two notions and contributes to the much greater pervasiveness of shame relates to the fact that its sources are apparently often immune to punishment and forgiveness, remedies that can be applied to appease feelings of guilt (40).

magical tree that erases their memories, freeing them from any sense of responsibility:

> Não havia em toda a redondeza um exemplar maior de mulambe. A árvore era conhecida, desde há séculos, como "a árvore das voltas": quem rodasse três vezes em seu redor perdia a memória. Deixaria de saber de onde veio, quem eram os seus antepassados. Tudo para ele se tornaria recente, sem raiz, sem amarras. Quem não tem passado não pode ser responsabilizado. O que se perde em amnésia, ganha-se em amnistia (320-321).

The state of instant amnesia obtained by moving around this special tree seems to correspond, as Booth describes, to a strategy commonly adopted among communities who have been involved in particularly traumatic events in order to avoid facing responsibility for them, and which may seriously impair the construction of a collective memory:

> forgetting seems to disrupt the continuity of identity and debt that is the fabric woven of collective memory. It is a forgetting typically of past injustices and strife, and so a forgetting of what we are as body-accountable. It frees the community of the debts it owes the past, to the individuals who form those earlier moments of what it is as a civic body. Forgetting, then, can be seen as a flight from responsibility, from the weight of memory and its duties (144).

This "árvore das voltas", which Mia Couto retrieves from Mozambican folk culture, provides an important means of introspection and social criticism in the contemporary narrative. In an interview conducted by Elisa Andrade Buzzo, Mia Couto emphasizes the role of contemporary Mozambican writers in the painful but essential process of recovering past memories in postcolonial societies:

> Uma coisa que me aflige, que me aflige muito, é que Moçambique passou estes dezasseis anos de guerra, perdeu um milhão de pessoas e nós somos só dezassete milhões, portanto foi um momento muito sofrido, um momento de luto. Nós ainda

> não fizemos o luto e de repente Moçambique esqueceu-se, se fores hoje a Moçambique ninguém fala do que se passou. É uma esponja que passou ali, não há resquícios. E isso não é bom, quer dizer, isso significa que nós perdemos aquilo que deixou de ser nosso, nós temos que ter acesso àquela memória. E os escritores podem ter aqui um outro papel ao escrever, ao abrir portas, ao fazer uma espécie de catarse sobre esse momento.

Although forgetting the past may give them a clear conscience, the inhabitants of Vila Longe are well aware that it is not just the disagreeable memories they lose, but an important part of their individual and collective history, as the barber of Vila Longe laments in the epigraph to chapter seventeen:

Primeiro, perdemos lembrança de termos sido do rio.
A seguir, esquecemos a terra que nos pertencera.
Depois da nossa memória ter perdido a geografia,
Acabou perdendo a sua própria história.
Agora, não temos sequer ideia de termos perdido alguma coisa.
(331)

As Booth puts it, in order to have a sense of who we are, and be able to project ourselves into the future, being grounded in the present (even if it is remorse-free) is not sufficient, it is absolutely necessary to recognize ourselves in our individual and collective past. Thus, memory of past events plays a crucial role in the constitution of identity:

> memory is essential to the coherence and enduringness of the community (or person), to its boundaries and persistence, in short, to its identity. Memory-identity matters because, among other things, it is the ground of imputation, of the society (or person) as owner of its past and responsible for it, as well as identical to, and thus capable of, making commitments to a future, of binding its future by a present promise (Preface, xviii).

O Outro Pé da Sereia can thus be seen as an attempt to recover and rewrite Mozambique's pre-colonial and colonial past from a postcolonial perspective, which is not surprisingly a growing tendency among African Lusophone writers. As Leite puts it, "interrogar o discurso europeu e descentralizar as estratégias discursivas; investigar, reler e reescrever a empresa histórica e ficcional, coloniais" (36) has become one of the most important tasks of postcolonial writing in general. Retrieving diverse historical and cultural memories of Mozambique in *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, Mia Couto challenges historical and literary legacies marked by centuries of colonialism and submission to Western influences, as Russell G. Hamilton argues in "A literatura dos PALOP e a Teoria Pós-colonial": "Re-escrever e re-mitificar o passado é, de certo modo, uma estratégia estético-ideológica que tem em vista protestar contra as distorções, mistificações e exotismos executados pelos inventores colonialistas de África" (Hamilton, 18). Describing crucial moments of the Mozambican past in an unsentimental fashion, *O Outro Pé da Sereia* encourages readers to remember and reflect upon the different stories of the different people who compose the history of plural Mozambique, in order to recognize the role of all of those stories in the making of a nation that is always already in process and whose past is owned by no-one other than all those who use it.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

> A consciência da ruptura aberta pelo colonialismo é clara e ilumina a inevitabilidade da situação que mesmo a independência não pôde solucionar. Diante do panorama que se abre, não há regresso e a sugestão (…) é só uma: dinamizar o legado, apropriar-se daquilo que outrora foi instrumento de dominação e foi, seguramente, fonte de angústia. A recuperação integral do passado é inviável. Seu esquecimento total se coloca como uma mutilação a deformar a identidade que se pretende como forma de defesa e de integração no mundo. A harmonia – tal como era, ou deveria ser – foi atingida e não podendo ser recuperada, há-de ser reinventada com aquilo que o presente oferece. *Interferir, desescrever, inventar* apresentam-se como palavras de ordem nesse processo de revitalização do território possível.
>
> Rita Chaves, "O passado presente na Literatura Africana"

> Memory obviously rejects amnesia, but it remains amenable to closure (…)
>
> Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*

Both Mia Couto in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* and Zakes Mda in *The Heart of Redness* have resorted to historical writings upon which relevant aspects of their historical narratives were based, clearly illustrating their concern for at least some degree of historical accuracy. However, they do not aim for absolute accuracy about historical events as understood by formal historical studies, but for the presentation of various (fictional) personal experiences and

narratives derived from complex historical periods of their countries' past which might help to better appreciate some of the troubling questions and challenges Mozambique and South Africa are faced with at the present time.[1] In *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, the historical narrative functions in its interweaving with the contemporary narrative to challenge some of the paralyzing manipulations regarding Mozambican history and identities that still linger, as Mia Couto has acknowledged:

> Uma das ideias que está subjacente a este livro é a de que revisitar a história com um outro olhar; um olhar que interroga e que coloca em causa aquilo que são as construções ou as mistificações que se fizeram da nossa própria história; a nossa é uma história perigosamente mistificada (…) Aliás, a memória moçambicana está paralisada, não tem pernas (Entrevista, Brugioni, x).

In relation to *The Heart of Redness*, whose text results from an intricate combination of historical and fictional elements (narratives, characters, events), even though the historical narrative relies heavily upon J. B. Peires's work, Mda has cautiously stressed the primarily fictional character of the novel:

> in my novel Nongqawuse is not the central figure but the backdrop. My story is not about her, but about my principal fictional characters, both in the past and the present, whose lives were affected by her prophecies (201, "A Response").

[1] In the epigraphs that precede the historical narrative in *O Outro Pé da Sereia* Mia Couto includes quotations from two historical documents that deal with D. Gonçalo da Silveira and his mission to the Monomotapa: *Os Portugueses no Monomotapa*, dating from 1892 and published by the Imprensa Nacional and *D. Gonçalo da Silveira* by Bertha Leite, published in 1946 by the Agência Nacional das Colónias. Zakes Mda has resorted to J.B. Peires's book *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57*, as the source for the historical narrative in *The Heart of Redness*, as discussed in chapter 3.

Examining how the Cattle-Killing episode is retrieved by Mda in *The Heart of Redness* and by Sindiwe Magona in *Mother to Mother*, Schatteman concludes that both resort to that traumatic event in the history of the Xhosa community as a parallel to the struggles of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in the 1990s. Mda and Magona's novels employ unique narrative structures and focus on different aspects, but both portray the two historical moments as times of pressing demands for affirmation amidst great instability and ambiguity:

> *Mother to Mother* and *The Heart of Redness* demonstrate that accusations and binary structures can only serve to erode the hope for true independence because they belie the interconnectedness of life in contemporary South Africa. The Cattle-Killing is transformed into present relations through its retelling, which grants each writer the freedom to forgo judgment, embrace irresolution, and seek out transcendent answers or possibilities for contemporary South Africa instead (290).

In *Ways of Dying*, whose chronological setting, though never directly mentioned, can be identified as that of the turbulent transition period from apartheid to democracy in South Africa in the early 1990s, faithfulness to historical facts is linked to the numerous deaths portrayed throughout the novel, all of which are based upon newspaper reports of the time: "The deaths in *Ways of Dying*, for instance, had been reported in *The Sunday Times* and *City Press* newspapers at the time that he was writing the novel" (Bell and Jacobs, 5). This extreme attention given to the factuality and historicity of death in the novel contrasts with its deliberate vagueness concerning time and place:

> In *Ways of Dying*, Mda has used as material for his plot recognisable historical events and a socio-political context that draws freely on the typical events of the years between 1990 and 1994, before the democratic elections. However, Mda elects

> to render the period with a deliberate vagueness, which enables him to reinforce the sense of liminality and uncertainty of the time, thereby disrupting attempts to fix the context specifically and emphasising the nature of the urban milieu that is represented (Courau and Murray, 92-93).

In their revisions of history, Couto and Mda's novels apparently corroborate the position developed in chapter 1 by André Brink on story and history to the effect that the writers' role in imagining the past (not in the sense of inventing it, but in the sense of allowing the contestation of existent histories, and perhaps even more importantly, of creating spaces for different and alternative versions of the past) might turn out to be as relevant as the historians' attempt at representing it. In Jacques Rancière's pithy summary, "the artistic work of memory is that which accords everyone the dignity of fiction" (9). Such an appeal for reliance on the imagination to represent the past in literature might appear at first as threatening to what is traditionally viewed as the production of knowledge, and particularly of historical knowledge, but Rita Chaves explains how the reassessment of history through literature, and consequently employing the imagination, can be regarded as one of literature's greatest assets:

> E talvez por essa via se reafirme uma das funções da ficção nesses tempos de reavaliação da história. Sua carga inventiva permite que mesmo o apego ao detalhe e a tendência da precisão, mais que uma garantia da verdade perseguida pelas concepções positivistas da história, se revelem formas de consolidar a ilusão romanesca que faz sobreviver a utopia da imaginação. Nesse sentido, parece-nos legítimo afirmar que a energia da literatura alimenta-se do que poderia fragilizá-la como ato de conhecimento da natureza humana e dos avanços e recuos de cada processo histórico – a certeza da sua limitação (197).

The limitations assumed by literature are associated, however, with the condition of historical discourse, at least as viewed by contemporary historiography. As Hayden White argues, historical discourse, which constitutes a privileged source of information about the historical past, cannot be regarded as entirely impartial precisely due to its connection with narrative:

> Insofar as historical discourse is willy-nilly condemned to narrativization it is by this circumstance alone committed to ideologizing practices, by which I mean the endowment of past events with meanings and values relevant to the promotion of political and social programs in the present for which historians write. For narrativization has to do with the problematic of action, whether action is considered to be possible or impossible, a good thing or a bad thing, a burden or a gift of the gods, of fate, or of history (30, "Historical Discourse").

Discussing the differences and similarities between academic writing (in the field of social sciences, and particularly of history) and literary writing, João Paulo Borges Coelho concludes that even though they have specific languages and methodologies, they do not oppose, but rather complement each other, given that both share the desire to question and propose possible answers as to the circumstances people find themselves in. He stresses how the search for knowledge, commonly associated with academic writing, plays an important role in fiction, while interpretation, more often linked to literary writing, is a crucial feature of scientific work:

> Quando o homem originalmente olha a realidade, como que sai fora dela para estabelecer o conjunto de relações que se encadeiam para formar a interpretação. Portanto, de alguma forma essa atitude de "domesticação" da realidade é já ficção. É interessante verificar que a palavra latina *persona* significa originalmente "máscara". Na imagem que fazemos de nós mesmos, da pessoa, na imagem que fazemos da sociedade e do real, existe já um mecanismo ficcional. Assim como, por outro lado, a ficção procura ela própria imitar a realidade (os latinos chamavam-lhe *figura veritas*, figuração da verdade) (233).

These interconnections between the fields of history and literature, along with recent approaches within historiography, as has already been seen, question the pertinence of a rigid distinction between knowledge and interpretation, and by extension, between history and memory. Given that memory, another means through which the past may be accessed and narrativized, like historical discourse, cannot be entirely trusted, as both tend to be subjective and selective, recovering as much as suppressing, postcolonial writers attempting to reassess history in their works may have to rely instead on the role of the imagination to explore the connections between past and present, the individual and the community.[2] In this light Couto and Mda retrieve from their differing social contexts historical episodes of great relevance for the redefinition of Mozambican and South African identities and rewrite them in equally complex contemporary contexts. As discussed in the previous chapters, Mda and Couto share a need to question conceptual oppositions, which is illustrated even in their novels' depiction of past and present events. In fact, the complex articulation between past and present times, characters and events in both novelists' works entails a sense of continuity and analogy that challenges more conventional conceptions which regard the passing of time (and thus past and present) as a mere succession of disjunctive events. This is particularly evident in Mda's *The Heart*

[2] In "Narratives of the Fake: The Collected Object, Personal Histories and Constructed Memory", Andrew Burrell explains how the gaps in an individual's memories, translated into his/her life narrative, are often filled, intentionally or not, by false memories: "While this is not an original notion, I have come to look at an individual's life narrative as being something that is made up of a person's collected memories, and it is through this narrative that a person forms an idea of himself or herself as a discrete entity. This narrative becomes extremely important as it is proof of individuality and from a poetic and perhaps psychological standpoint could be seen as making me, me – or you, you. There are, however, gaps that form in these narratives and it is in these gaps that the so-called fake memories slip in unnoticed, or noticed, or, in some instances even welcomed with open arms" (105).

of Redness and Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, as in both novels the resort to a historical narrative parallel to a contemporary one becomes a crucial factor in the analysis of the mechanisms and motivations behind the construction of a nation's historical and cultural memories. The attention both novelists dedicate in their works, not just to historical facts, but also to the role memory plays in the reworking of those historical facts might be linked to the distinction W. James Booth establishes between the complementary notions of the historical past and memory:

> The historical past, a terrain mapped along a grid of causally linked series of events, across a linear, homogeneous time, does individuate us, as persons and communities; but it is memory, individual or collective, whose landscape is uneven, marked by trauma, conflict, and guilt, and always eliding the past and present, that by gathering in this past, by appropriating it, gives us identity and a moral narrative of pride, shame and indebtedness, that ties us across time to *our* past and the burdens this past imposes simply by virtue of being ours (61, italics in the original).

Memory and history, past and present are accordingly intermingled in the works of Mda and Couto, as contemporary challenges in South African and Mozambican post-apartheid and postcolonial societies depicted in their novels are juxtaposed with past events that had been kept in silence for a long time.

Rejecting simplistic binaries while asserting their criticism of all kinds of historical and contemporary mystifications and manipulations, both writers allow important spaces for ambiguity and imagination in their novels (visible, for instance, in their presentations of various, at times conflicting, perspectives on the historical record), which leave to readers the choice of interpretation. Following Brink's reasoning, it could be said that the connections between life, story and history suggested by Couto and Mda in their

novels, reinforced by the multiplicity of choices they offer, could be regarded as postcolonial literature's greatest challenge:

> If life itself is story-shaped, then the choices presented by story cannot be denied or avoided, as they coincide with the choices of life. If stories offer several versions of history, that is, of "given" events (even though, of course, ultimately nothing is ever "given"), the imperative of choice is even more urgent, and certainly more richly textured and more rewarding (41).

While the use of the imagination plays a crucial role in Mda and Couto's works, the retrieval of meaningful episodes pertaining to African history and memory carried out in their novels is particularly meaningful in the context of contemporary African literature. In his examination of African historical novels, Wole Ogundele worries that the relatively small number of African historical novels, particularly of novels focusing on the precolonial past, might signal a tendency to intentionally elide valuable, yet uncomfortable, chapters of the African historical memory:

> The paucity of historical novels on the precolonial past especially says much about the predisposition of the postcolonial elite class to that past. The absence of a vigorous historical imagination indicates a preoccupation with the immediate colonial past and the admittedly all-absorbing postcolonial present, to the almost total neglect of the more distant past (126).

Contradicting this tendency and contesting what Couto himself has described as an "acumulação de amnésias e de esquecimentos" (Entrevista, Brugioni, x) that cripples and at times paralyzes their nations' historical and cultural memories, the novels of Zakes Mda and Mia Couto analysed in this work might be regarded as transgressive:

> The act of bearing witness is also a gesture of defiance and resistance: against the flow of time which distances us from what went before, against an absorption in the present, and against the desire to forget or conceal. It is an act of resistance related to an absence, a silence, and therefore to a certain kind of vulnerability: that what is absent will be forever lost (Booth, 73).

Combining a concern with some of the most complex present challenges faced by South African and Mozambican societies with the use of the imagination and the task of retrieving neglected historical and cultural perspectives in their novels, Zakes Mda and Mia Couto offer some of the most refreshing, yet puzzling perspectives in contemporary African postcolonial literature.

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4. Filmography

- *District 9* (TriStar Pictures, 2009) dir. Neill Blomkamp

- *Max and Mona* (DV8 Films, 2004) dir. Teddy Mattera

- *The Wooden Camera* (Odelion, 2003) dir. Ntshaveni Wa Luruli